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Deconstructing the American Embassy

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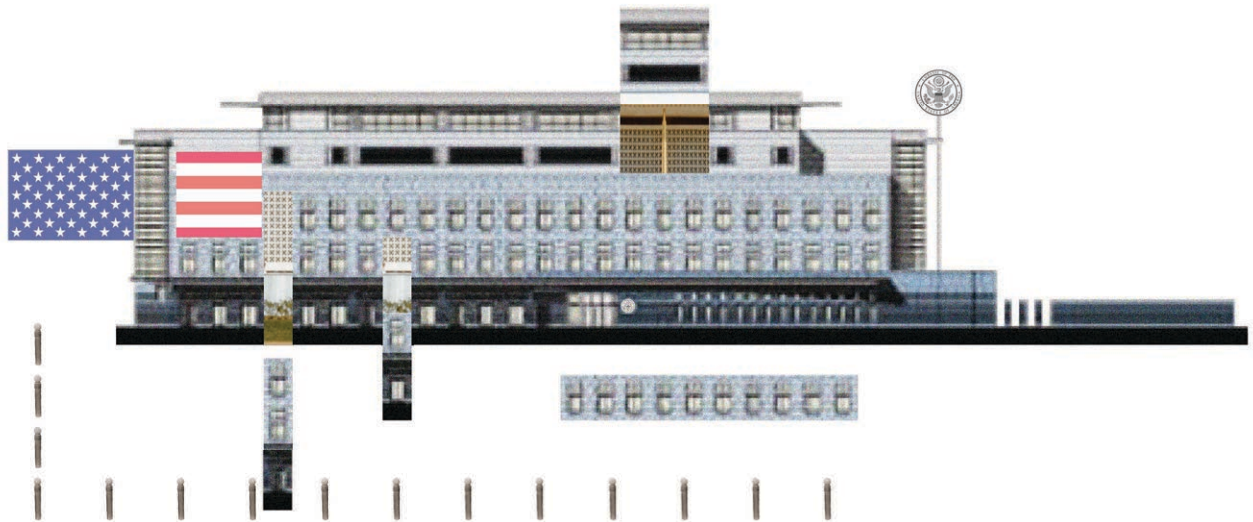


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Deconstructing the American Embassy

Thesis Prep Book
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School of Architecture

Primary Adv: Martin Hattasch
Secondary Adv: Ryan Ludwig
11.23.2012

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abstract

decon’struct, verb.

- 1. analyze (a text or a linguistic or conceptual system) by deconstruction, typically in order to expose its hidden internal assumptions and contradictions and subvert its apparent significance or unity
- 2. reduce (something) to its constituent parts in order to reinterpret it

diplomacy, noun.

- 1. The management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys; the business or art of the diplomatist; skill or address in the conduct of international intercourse and negotiations.
- 2. Skill or address in the management of relations of any kind; artful management in dealing with others.

Deconstructing Diplomacy

The field condition between the city and the existing embassy structure is the space where cultures collide and where the architect must articulate the conditions of exchange. The buffer zone is the physical space that represents political negotiation. The retrofitted embassy in Paris has expanded its primary security perimeter far into the urban fabric. This public space has become semi-public, characterized by surveillance, Marine guards and restricted vehicle access. My thesis asserts that embassy function and symbolism can be manifest and characterized in this buffer. The perception of the embassy will be articulated by icon and iconography in this interstitial space between sovereign territories.

Effective diplomacy is only possible with mutual respect and recognition of sovereignty. Historically, the construction of embassies is a reciprocal endeavor that conveys a serious commitment to diplomacy. In times of political unrest, the evacuation of diplomatic personnel indicates that peaceful negotiation has failed. The situation is more complicated today. Diplomats are often kept abroad despite danger in order to maintain an illusion of diplomacy. Increasingly violent terrorist attacks that target embassies highlight the embassies’ symbolic significance and also their vulnerability. The pressure for an embassy to be both diplomatic and also extremely secure has precipitated a singular design approach: standardization.

The standard embassy design (SED) considers security the primary concern at the expense of diplomatic communication. These projects are removed from the city to suburban or rural neighborhoods. The system is a stark comparison to iconic embassies of the 1950’s by Saarinen, Breuer, Durrell-Stone, and others. The symbolism of the embassy has been reduced to the seal, the flag, AND the eagle-- albeit on the 10’ tall perimeter wall. I propose completely divorcing the symbolism from the structure. In effect, this removes the target from the building itself.

In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown reconsider the iconic and the generic. Their investigation emphasizes the perception of the embassy in its context. The symbolism of the embassy as icon is not sustainable because of the impending terrorist threat. The proportion of the entrance to Saarinen’s project in London is only experienced after passing through the blockaded street on foot and moving through the exterior security checkpoint. This is the reality of designing secure diplomatic space today and the attention to this space has not yet been closely considered. “There are those who find fault with architecture that conceals its purpose...but such criticism misses its mark when a building, like an embassy, has more than one purpose.”

“There are those who find fault with architecture that conceals its purpose...but such criticism misses its mark when a building, like an embassy, has more than one purpose.” (Loeffler) This quote is at the crux of my thesis. The embassy cannot be a symbol and an instrument for diplomacy.

Security must be designed just as any other aspect of a building. The process should be site specific instead of standardized. The mediation of the different cultures and people occurs in the contested space between the embassy and the city.

Each function of the embassy must be isolated in order to be more effective. The visa application and passport services need not be beyond four security checkpoints when two is adequate. The local community services are likewise separated from the building. Other aspects relating to high security will not be burdened with maintaining an illusion of diplomacy.

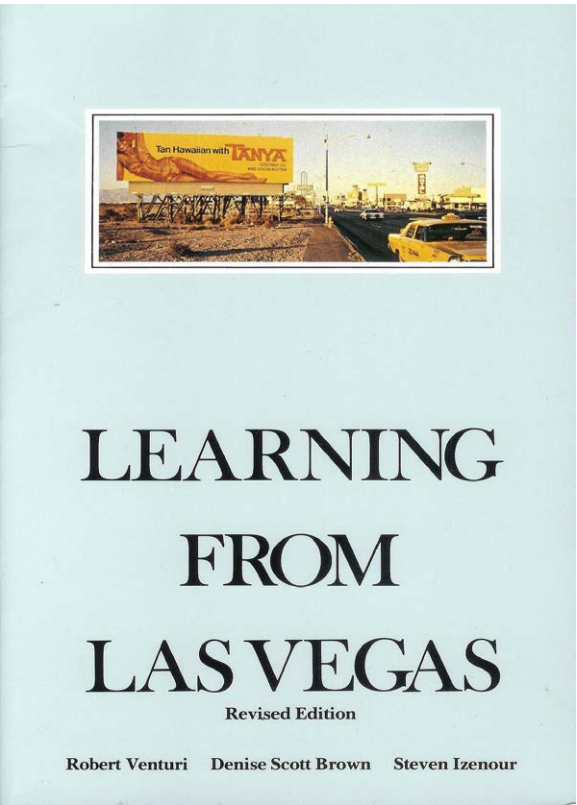
Contemporary diplomatic functions have outgrown the typological embassy building. The barricaded sidewalks and streets are evidence that additional space is required to conduct business safely. Retrofitted embassies in London, Paris, and Berlin expand their security perimeter into the urban condition to maintain the architectural icon of diplomacy. New embassies should utilize the contested zone between the building and the city instead of relocating in rural neighborhoods. It is the purpose of this thesis to enable functional and symbolic diplomatic exchange at the location of intersecting sovereignty.

context



Architectural Lineage

The field condition between the city and the existing embassy structure is the space where cultures collide and where the architect must articulate the conditions of exchange. The buffer zone is the physical space that represents political



Theory & Discourse

Contemporary diplomatic functions have outgrown the typological embassy building. The barricaded sidewalks and streets are evidence that additional space is required to conduct business safely. Retrofitted embassies in London, Paris, and Berlin expand their security perimeter into the urban condition to maintain the architectural icon of diplomacy. New embassies should utilize the contested zone between the building and the city instead of relocating in rural neighborhoods. It is the purpose of this thesis to enable functional and symbolic diplomatic exchange at the location of intersecting sovereignty.

³ Peace of Westphalia . Iwo Jima . Sanaa, Yemen . Refer to Figure Credits
⁴ *Learning from Las Vegas* Cover . Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour . MIT Press

E1

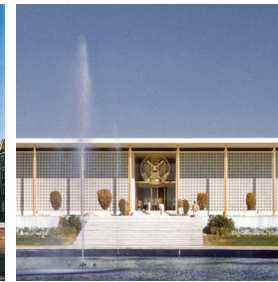
E2

E3



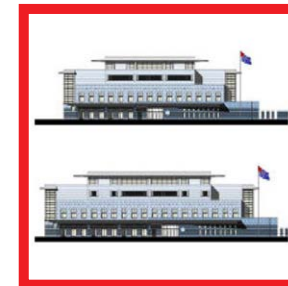
First US Diplomatic Mission, Tangier

Diplomatic Relations with France



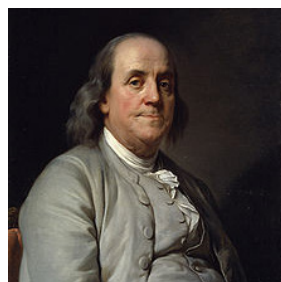
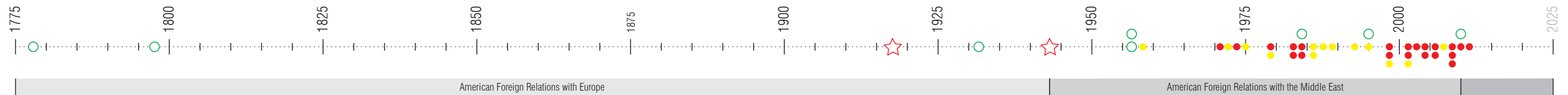
First US Embassy Constructed Paris

Saarinen, London
Breuer, The Hague



Standard Embassy Design Implemented

London Design Competition



Benjamin Franklin



French Revolution



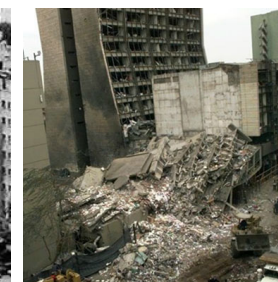
WW1



WW2



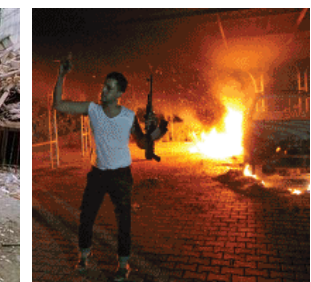
Beirut
Lebanon



Nairobi
Kenya



Dar es Salaam
Tanzania



Benghazi
Libya

3 Eras in Embassy Design

The lineage of embassy design is three significant periods in history. The first is characterized by the recognition of sovereign states that begins with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This is the environment in which the United States first begins to design its foreign diplomatic outposts. The second era begins after World War II when the United States becomes the preeminent world power. The projects designed during this period are in the International Style. Projects are completed by architects such as Eero Saarinen, Marcel Breuer and Edward Durrell Stone. They are the icons of the architecture of diplomacy. The third, and current, era is one of ramped up security to address the real threat from radical terrorist organizations. These events precipitated the Stand Embassy Design (SED). It is time for a new approach to embassy design to foster a new era of diplomacy.

E1 | sovereignty

The treaty not only signalled the end of the destructive wars that had ravaged Europe, it also represented the triumph of national sovereignty over Habsburg Empire. The treaties' regulations became integral to the constitutional law of the Holy Roman Empire, and stood as a precursor to later large international treaties and thereby the development of international law in general. This was the environment of the initial American embassies. The embassy in Paris fits into the historical lineage founded on the sovereignty of individual states.



E2 | hegemony

The post-WWII era saw an incredible expansion to American diplomatic missions. The international style represented democracy, freedom, independence.

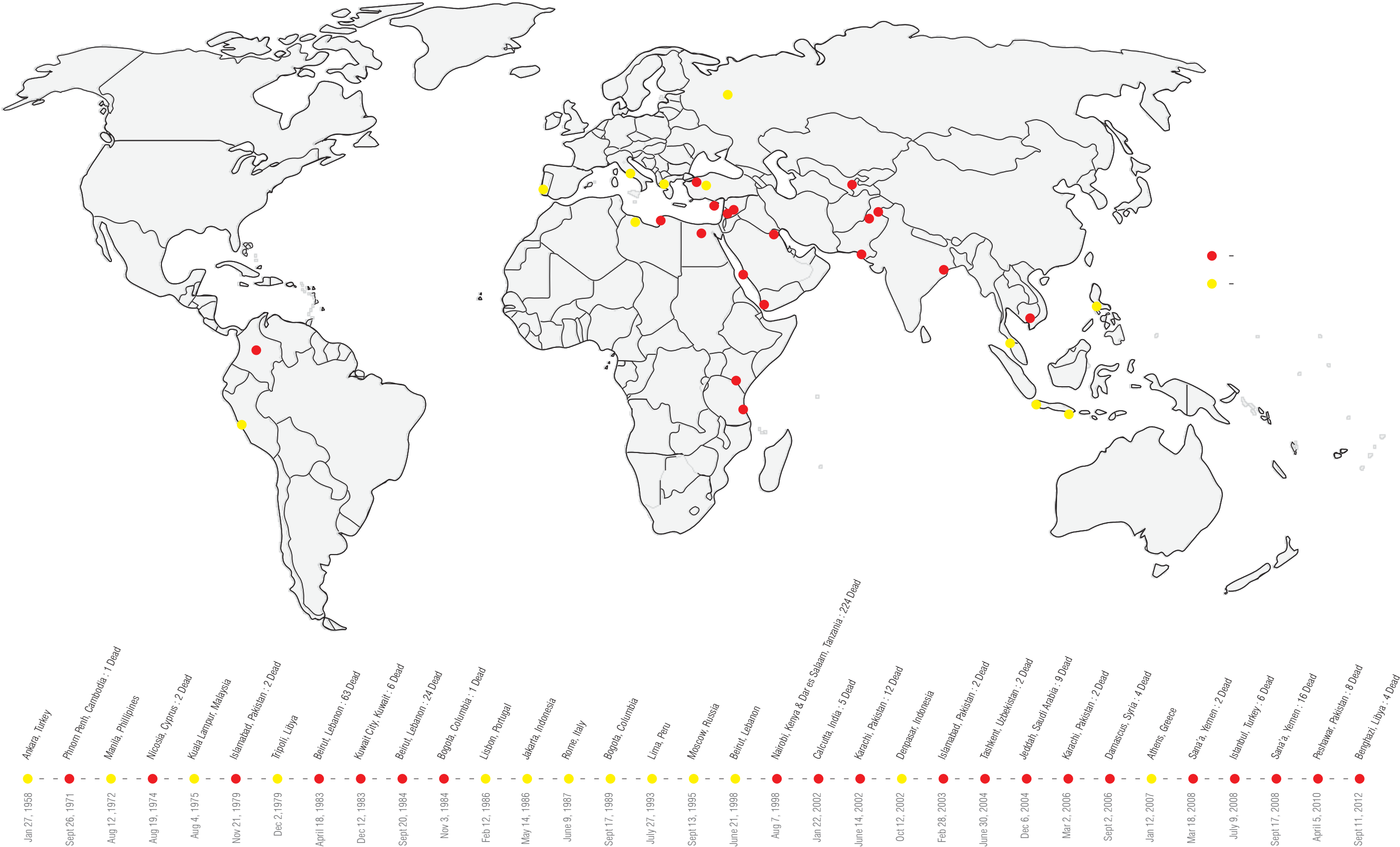


E3 | vulnerability

The modern embassies of the 1950's and 1960's proved to be seriously vulnerable to attacks from radical islamic groups around the world. Attacks in Beirut in 1983 highlights the increasing mortality and frequency of terrorist acts directed at diplomatic buildings that continues to this day.



Terrorist Attacks on US Diplomatic Missions

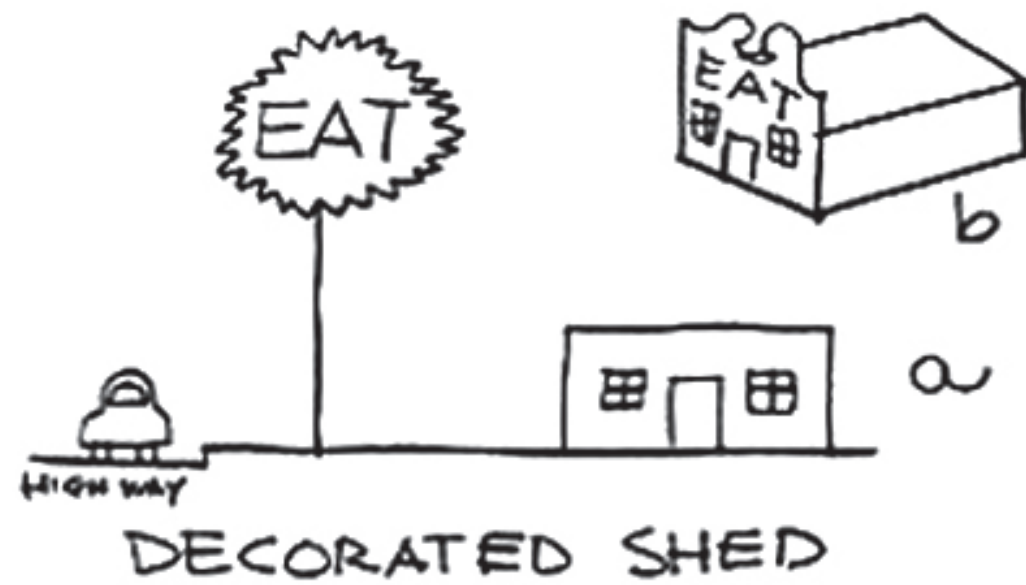
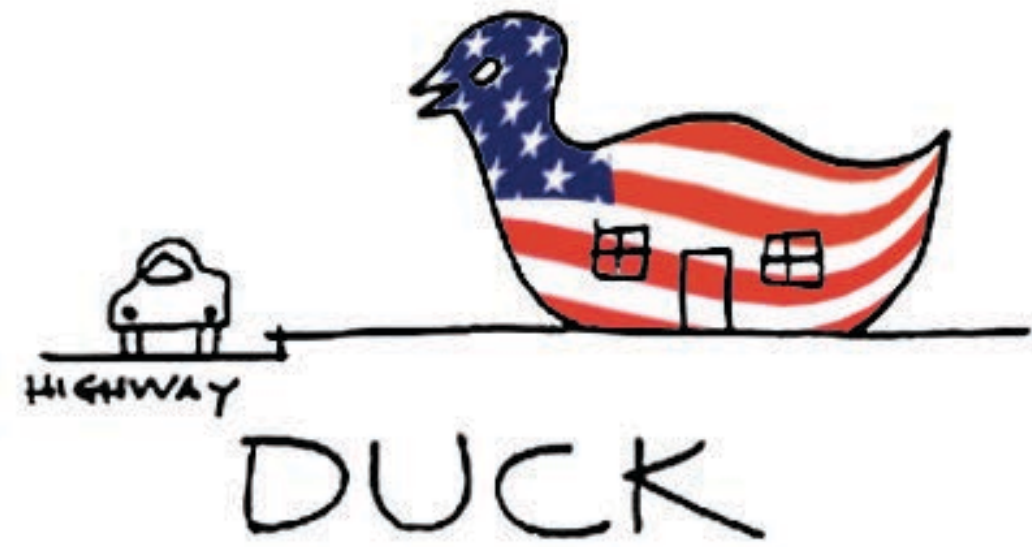
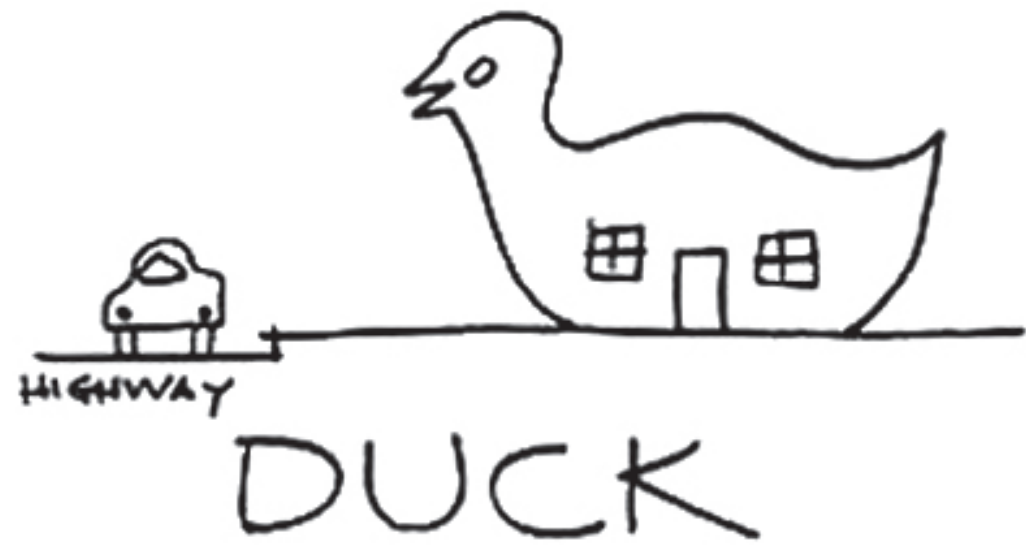


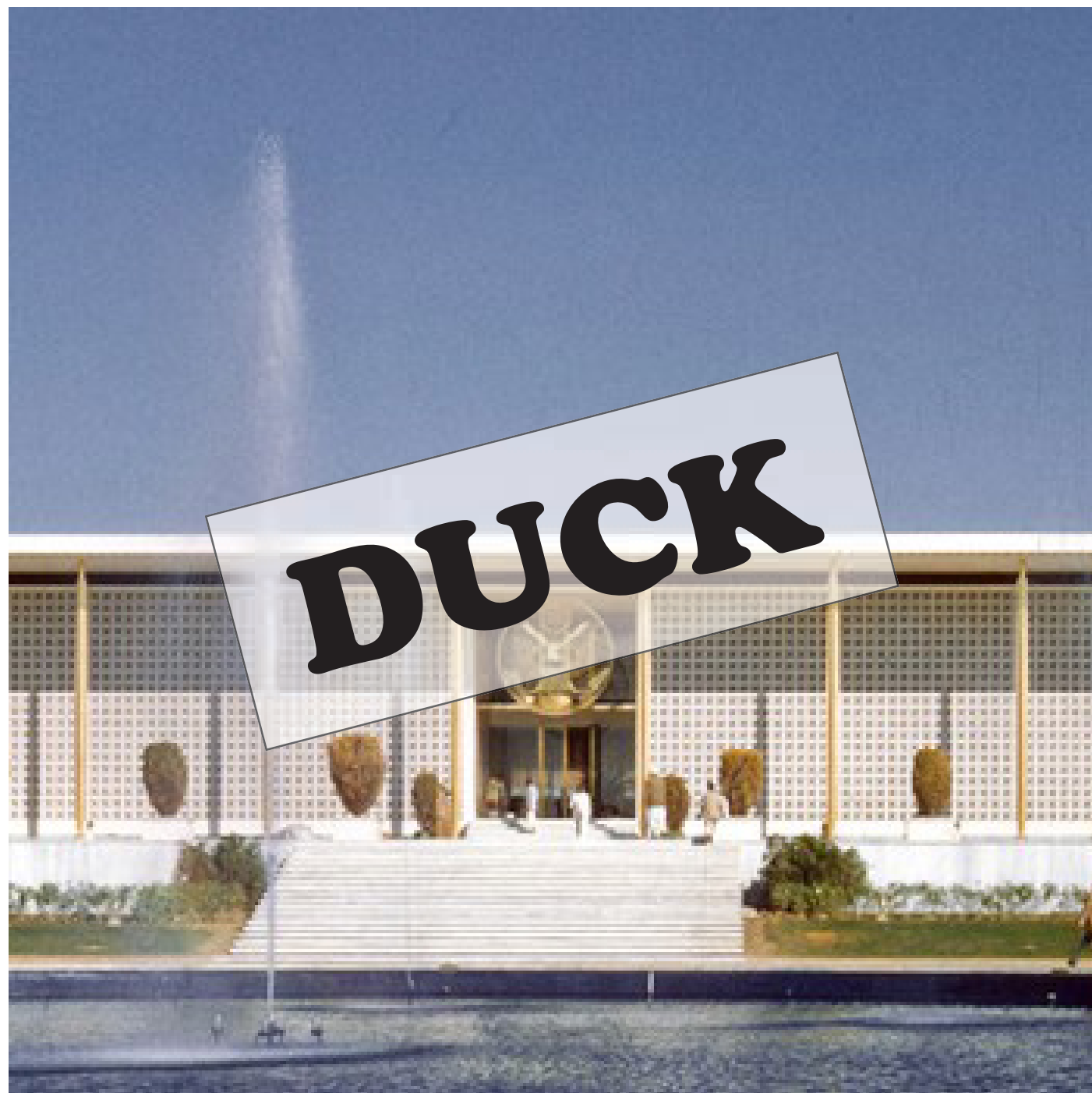


National media coverage of World Trade Center Attacks

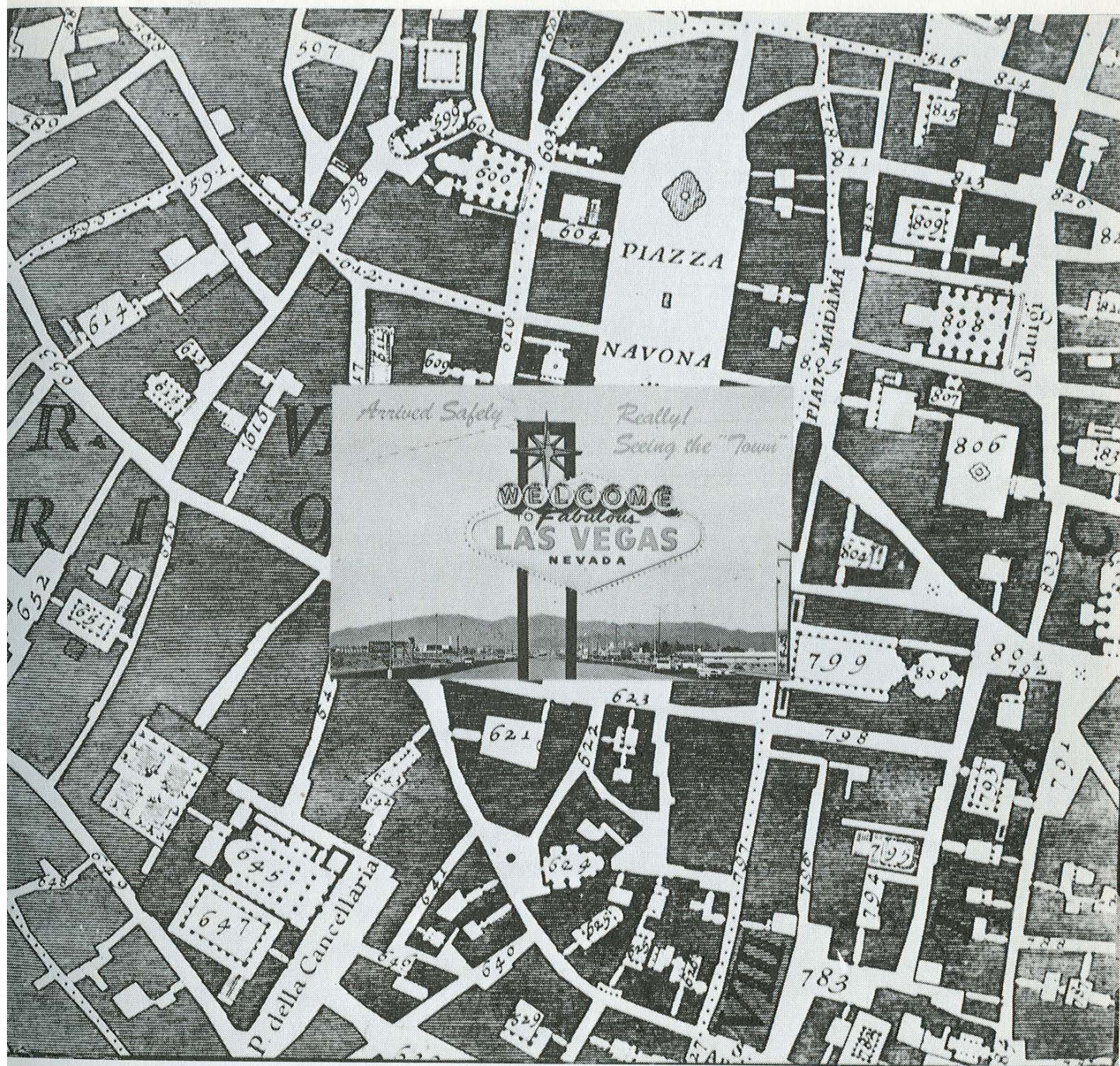


Osama bin Laden advocating jihad in propaganda video









“Complex programs and settings require complex combinations of media beyond the purer architectural triad of structure, form, and light at the service of space. They suggest an architecture of bold communication rather than one of subtle expression.”

- Robert Venturi

methodology 1

site | paris





16 Delano and Aldrich . Paris, France
17 Delano and Aldrich . Paris, France

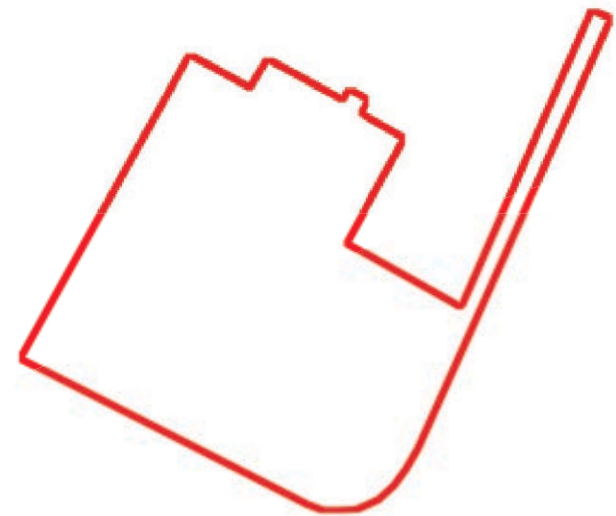
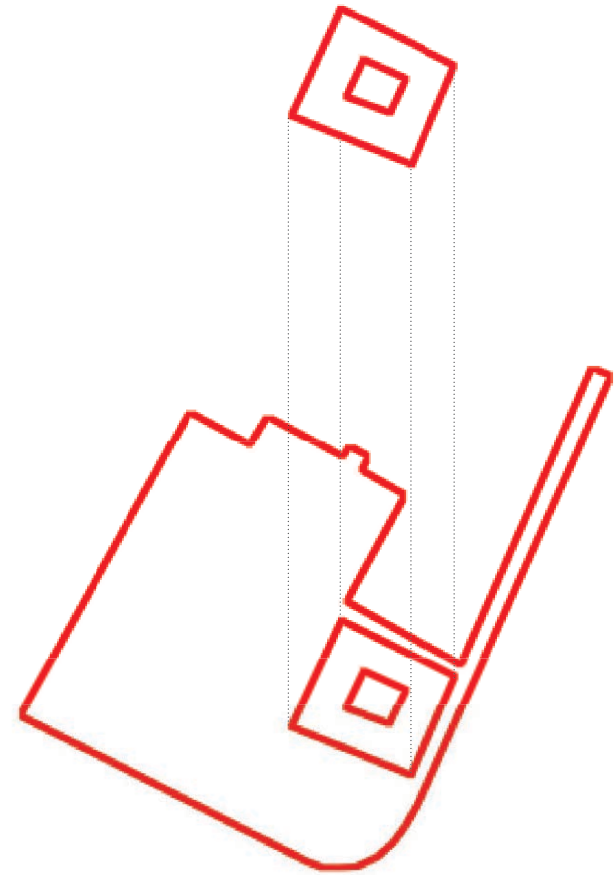
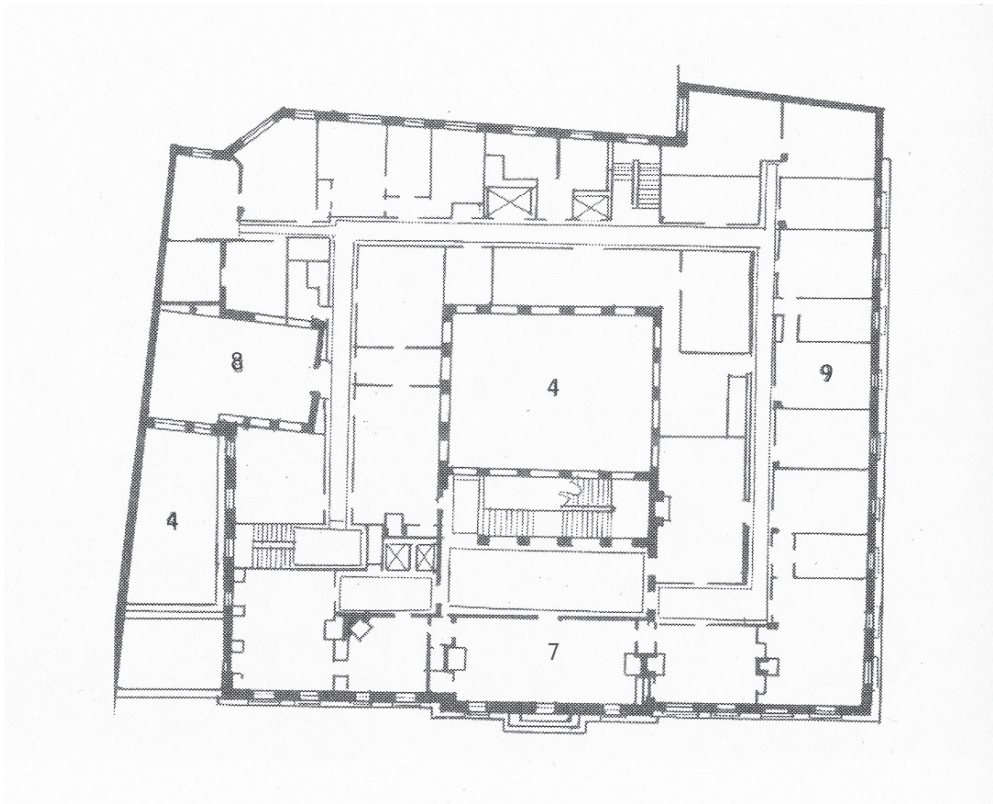


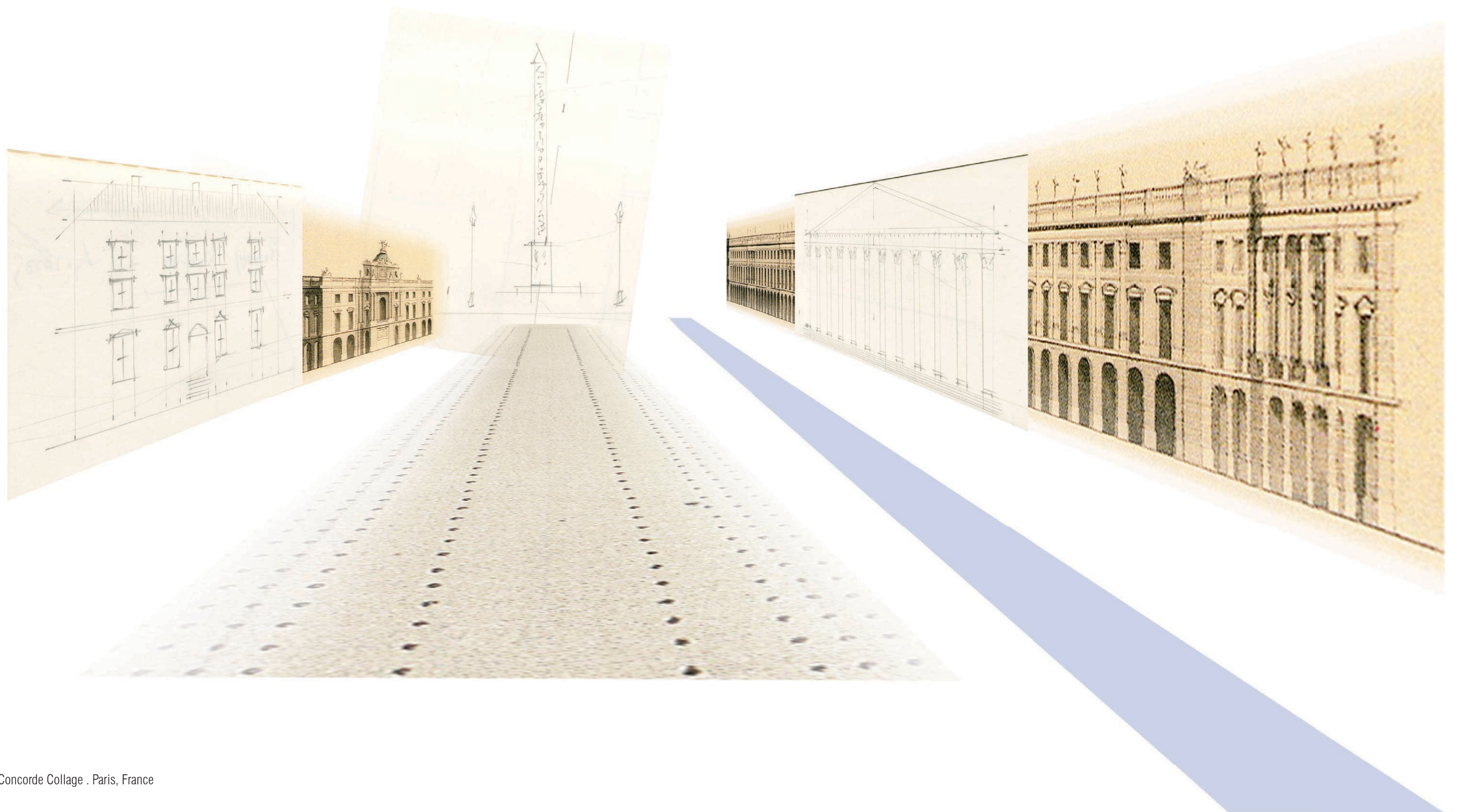
Commercialism is to Venturi

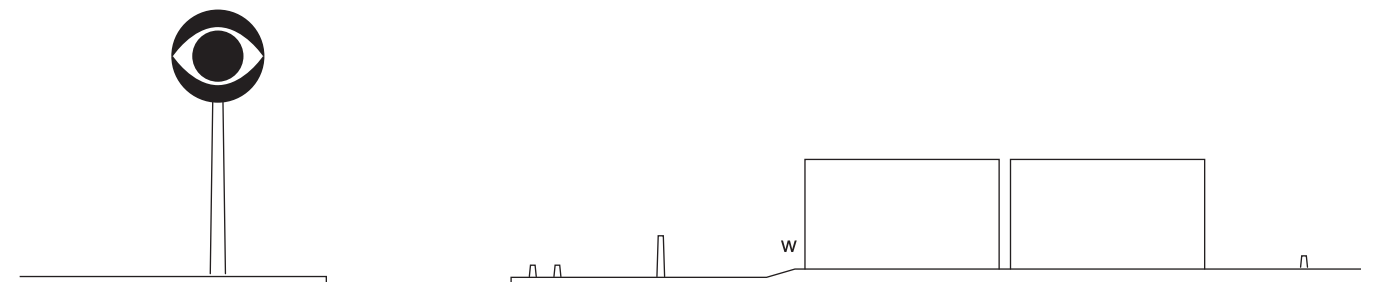
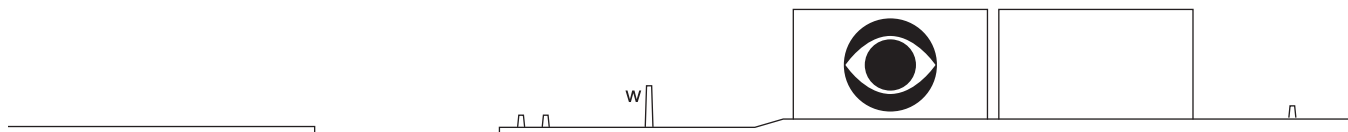
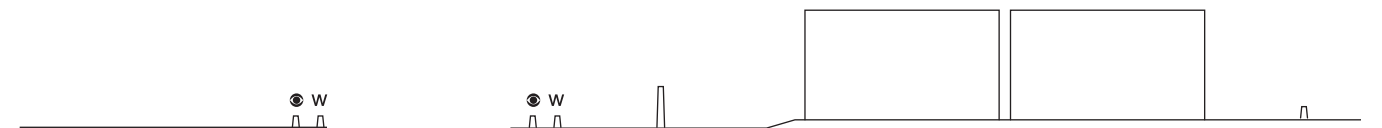
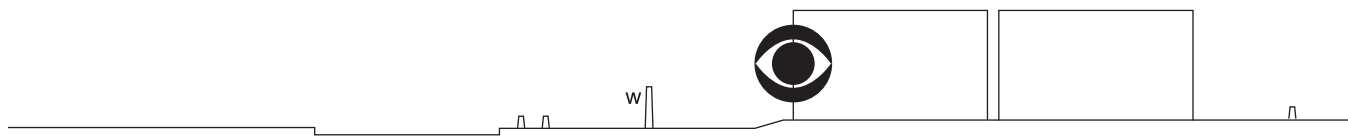
On the commercial strip the supermarket windows contain no merchandise. There may be signs announcing the day's bargains, but they are to be read by pedestrians approaching from the parking lot. The building itself is set back from the highway and half hidden, as is most of the urban environment, by parked cars. The vast parking lot is in front, not at the rear, since it is a symbol as well as a convenience. The building is low because air conditioning demands low spaces, and merchandising techniques discourage second floors; its architecture is neutral because it can hardly be seen from the road.

Diplomacy is to Me

Along the Champs Elysees the bulletproof embassy windows contain no people. There may be signs declaring the existence of the US Embassy, but they are to be read by American pedestrians passing through the security perimeter. The building itself is set back from the road and half hidden, as are most diplomatic posts, by bollards, trees, security guards, surveillance cameras and defensible walls. The courtyard is in front, not in the middle, because it is a symbol as well as a convenience. The building is palace-like designed in the style of its neighboring buildings because French law requires the maintenance of Gabriel's plan for the Place de la Concorde, and the palazzo typology is historically indicative of political buildings; its architecture is neutral because it is disguised in its context.







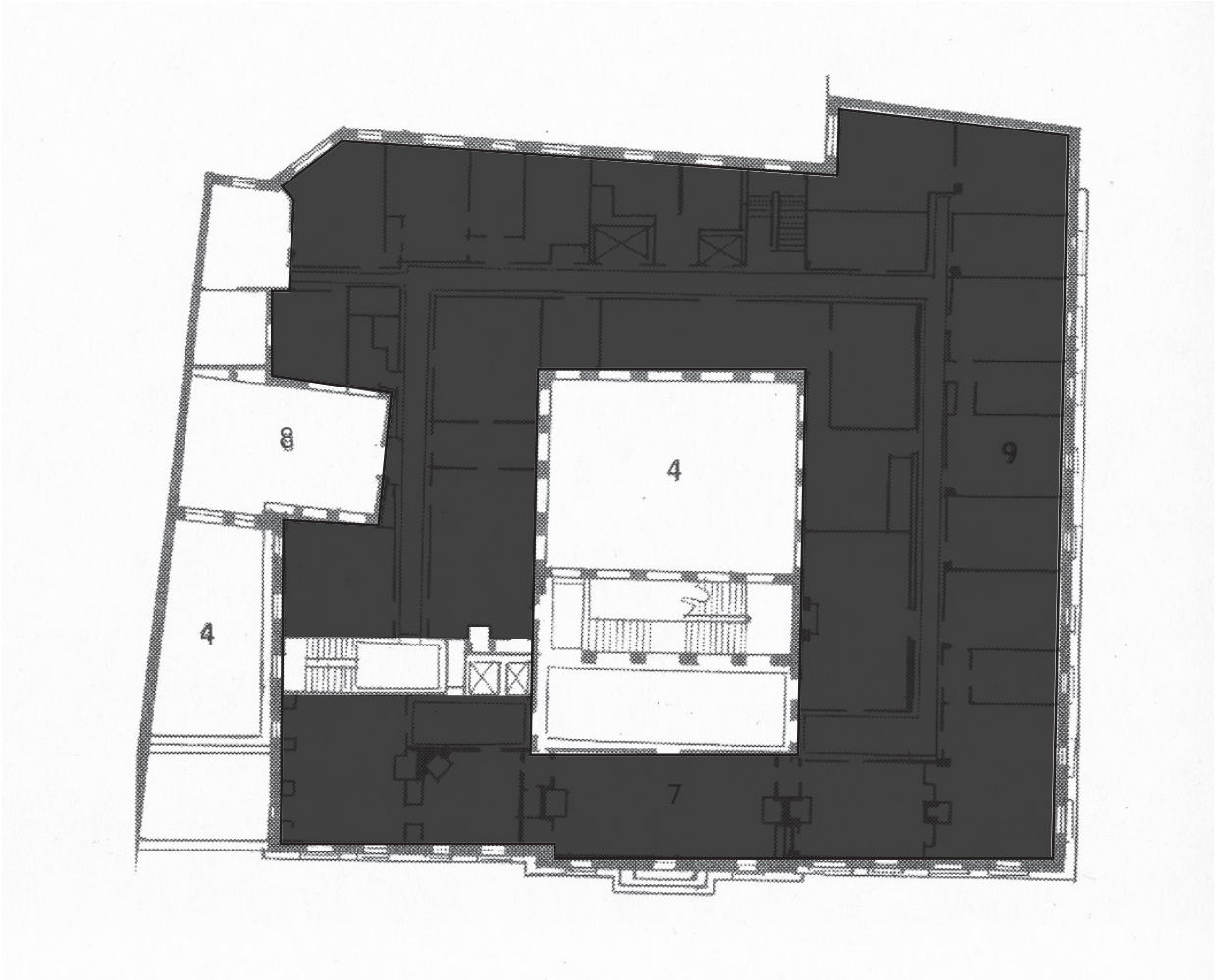
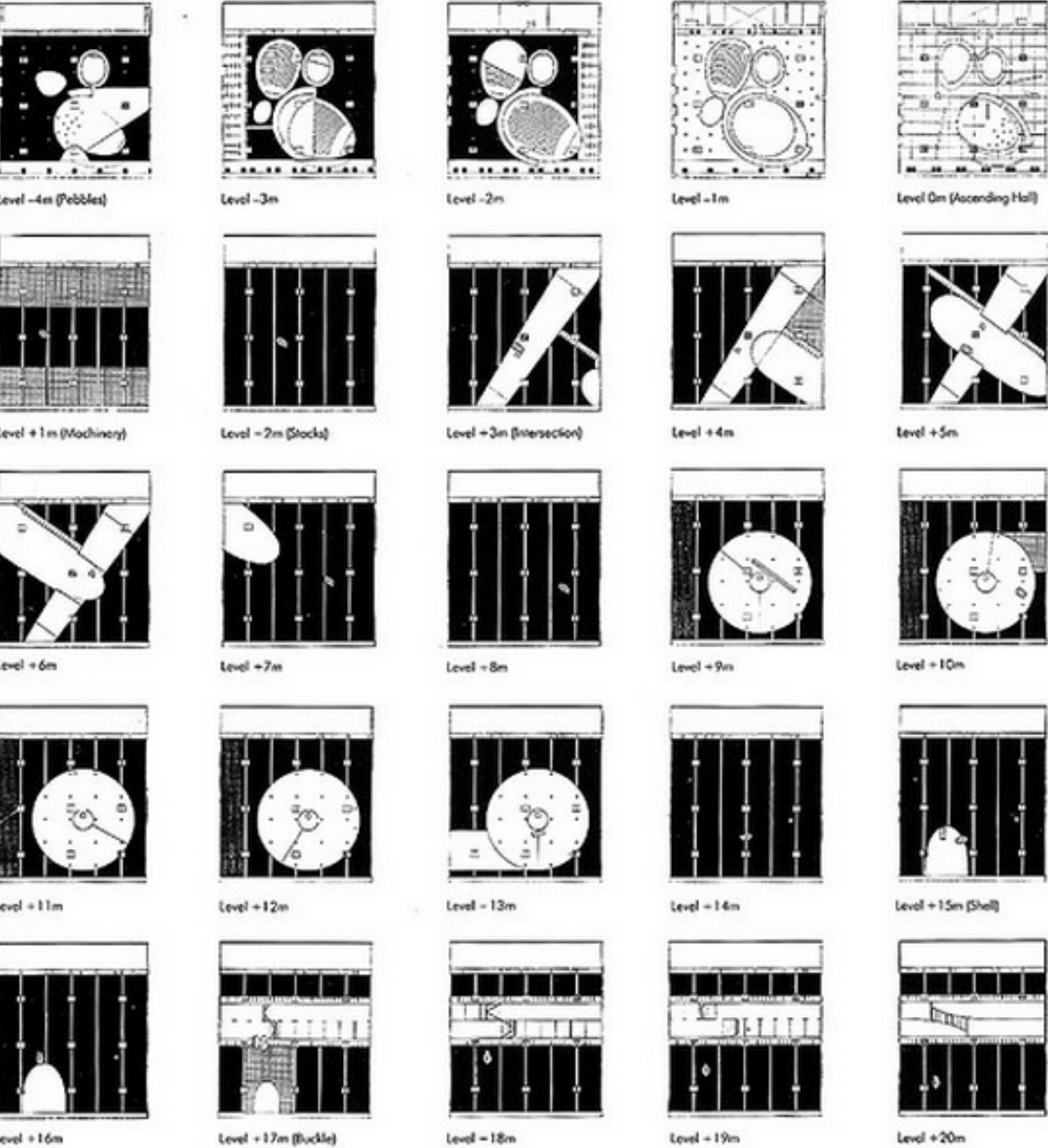
methodology 2

program

Embassy Program	
300,000 sf project	
Visitor Services	
Main Entrance Consular Entrance Service Entrance	
<div></div>	
Resource Center	5000sf
Employee Services	
Living Quarters Offices	
<div></div>	
Office Support	5,000sf
Exterior	
Public Plaza Consular Plaza Promenade Garden	

National Library of France Paris, 1989

Plans of the various levels



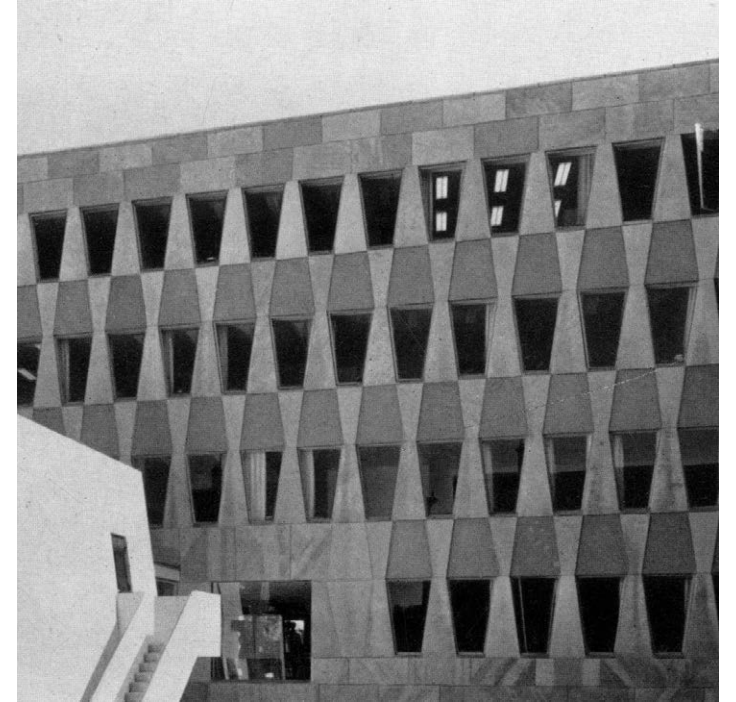
21 Rem Koolhaas . National Library of France . OMA
 22 Embassy Program . Author

methodology 3

precedents



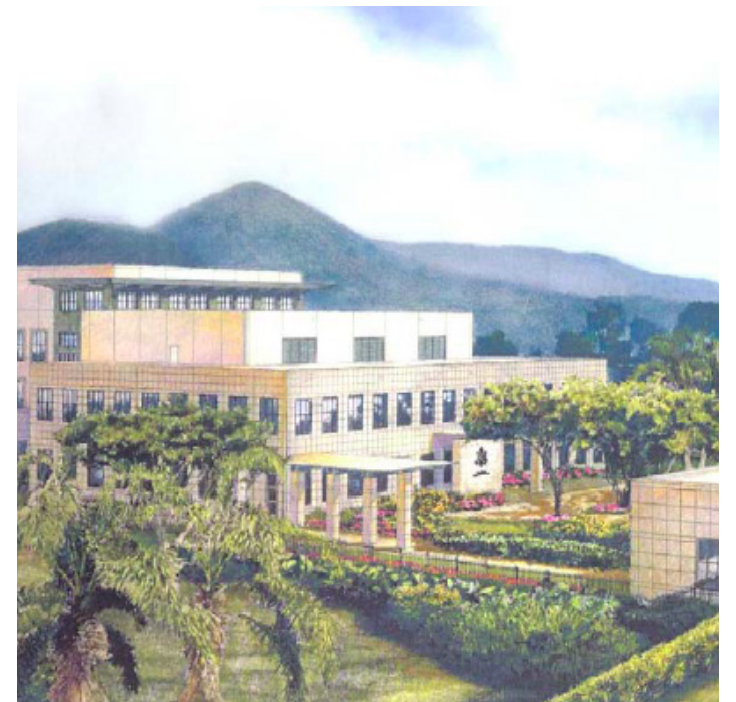
Symbolism



Form



Security



Site



Paris, France



London, England



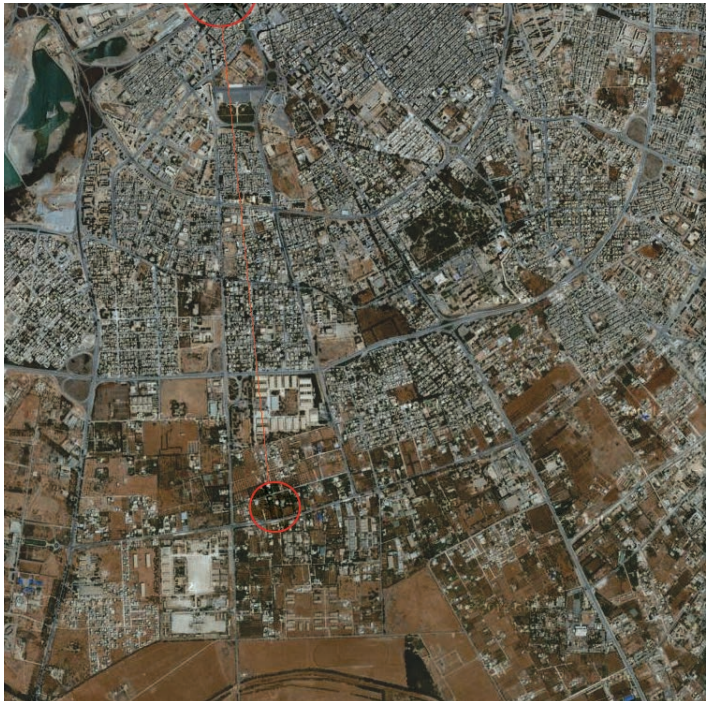
New Delhi, India



Cairo, Egypt



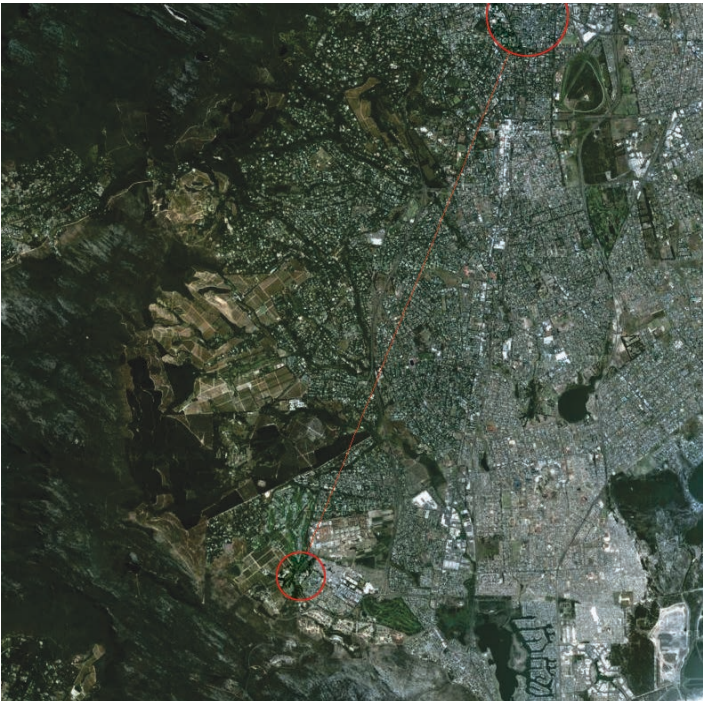
Berlin, Germany



Benghazi, Libya



Tblisi, Georgia



Cape Town, South Africa



Location: London, England
 Date: 1956

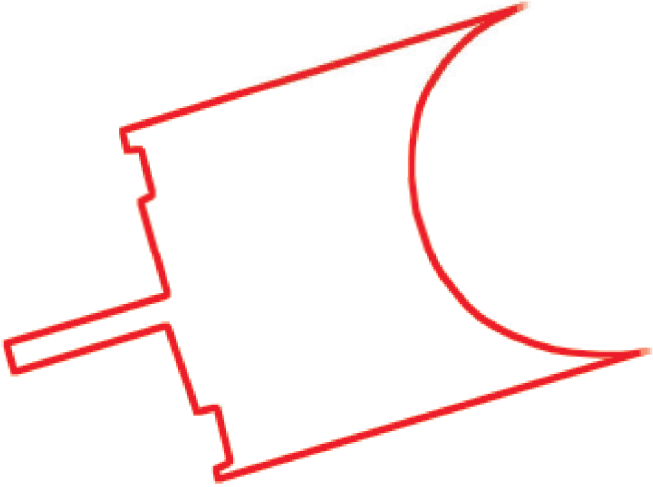
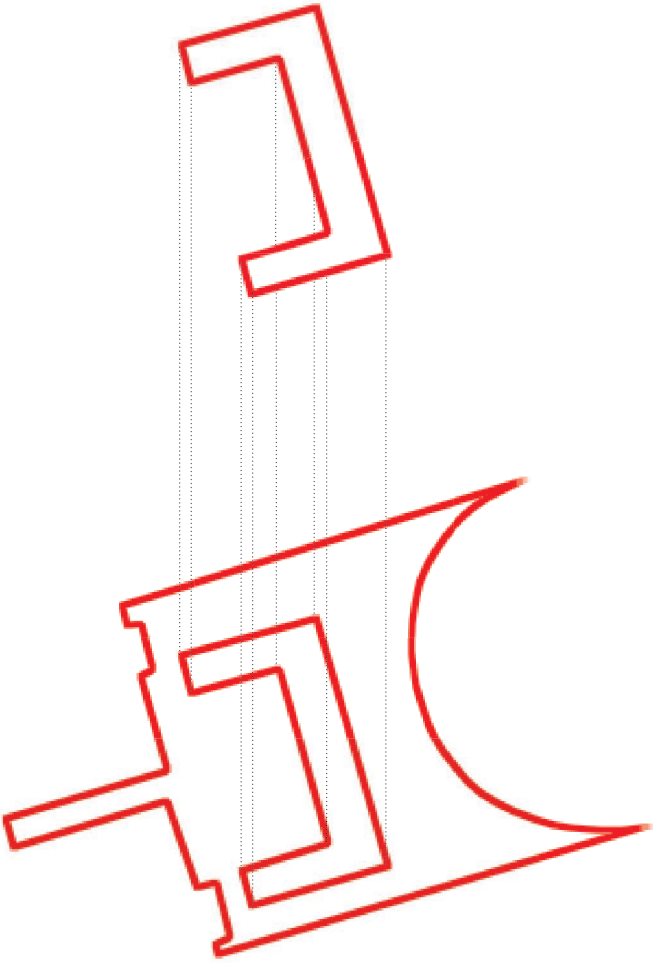
Architect: Eero Saarinen
 Size: TBA

Lesson: Retrofitted security expansion

The modernist Saarinen embassy was deemed unsafe until it could expand its security perimeter into its urban context.

The redefinition of diplomatic exchange is formally the space in between the embassy and the city.

The icon of diplomacy is compromised so the space of its function and symbolism must be adjusted.



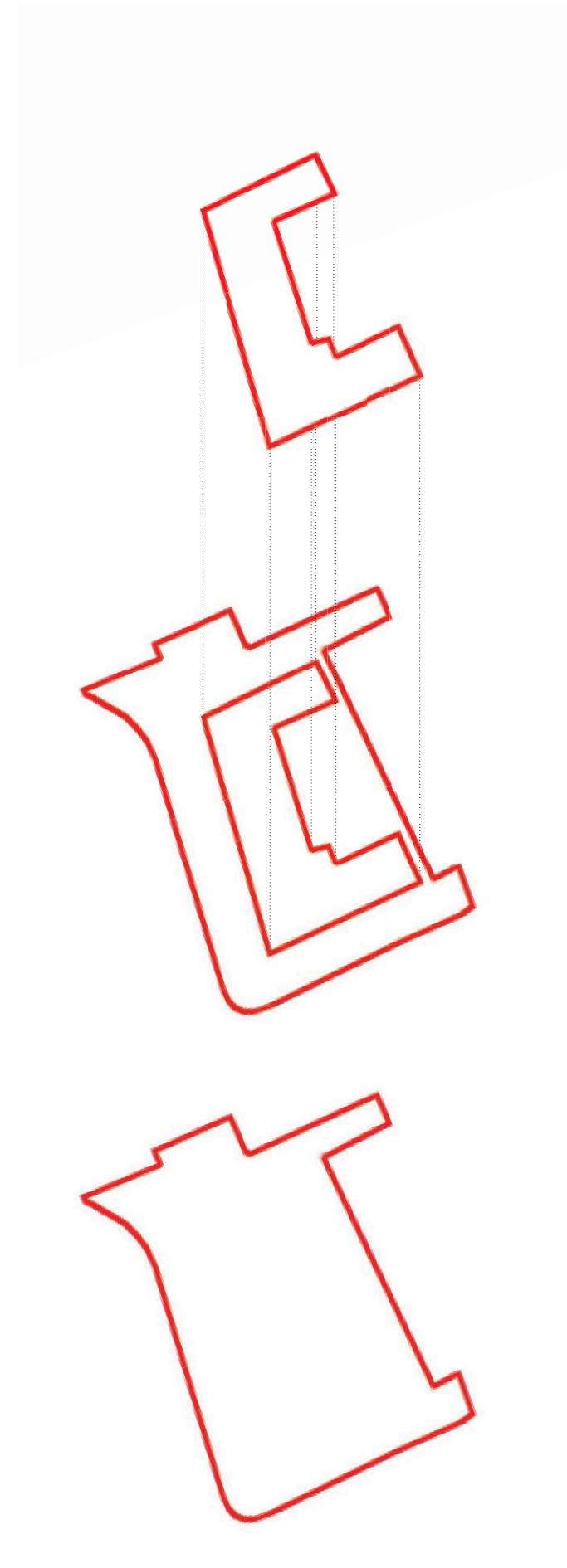


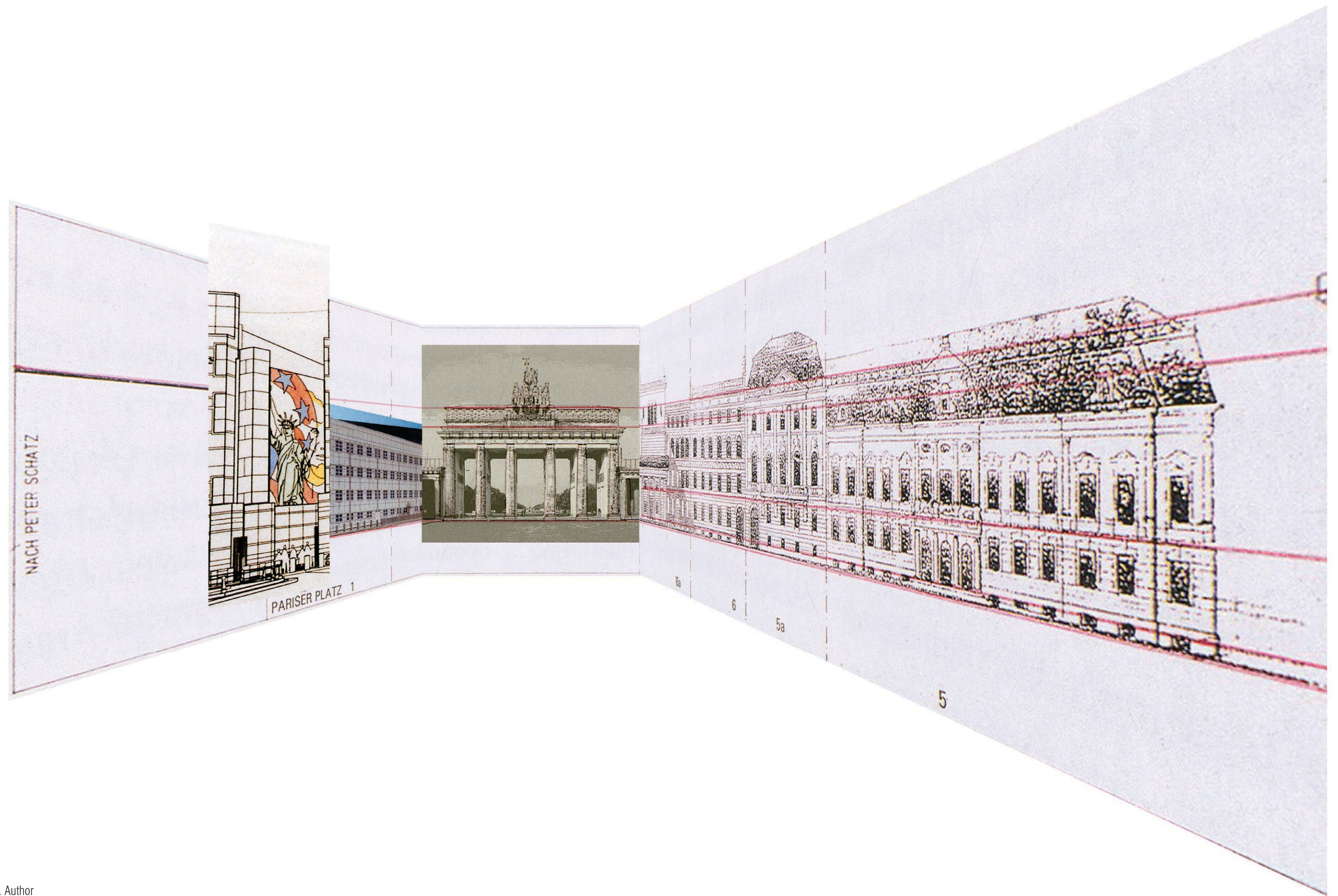
Location: Berlin, Germany
Date: 1995
Architect: Venturi Scott Brown
Size: TBA

Lesson: Signage and Symbol in the Embassy

The United States government broke ground for the construction of the new American Embassy on Pariser Platz in October 2004. The building opened for business in the spring of 2008.

The embassy has been highly criticized for its appearance on the public square.







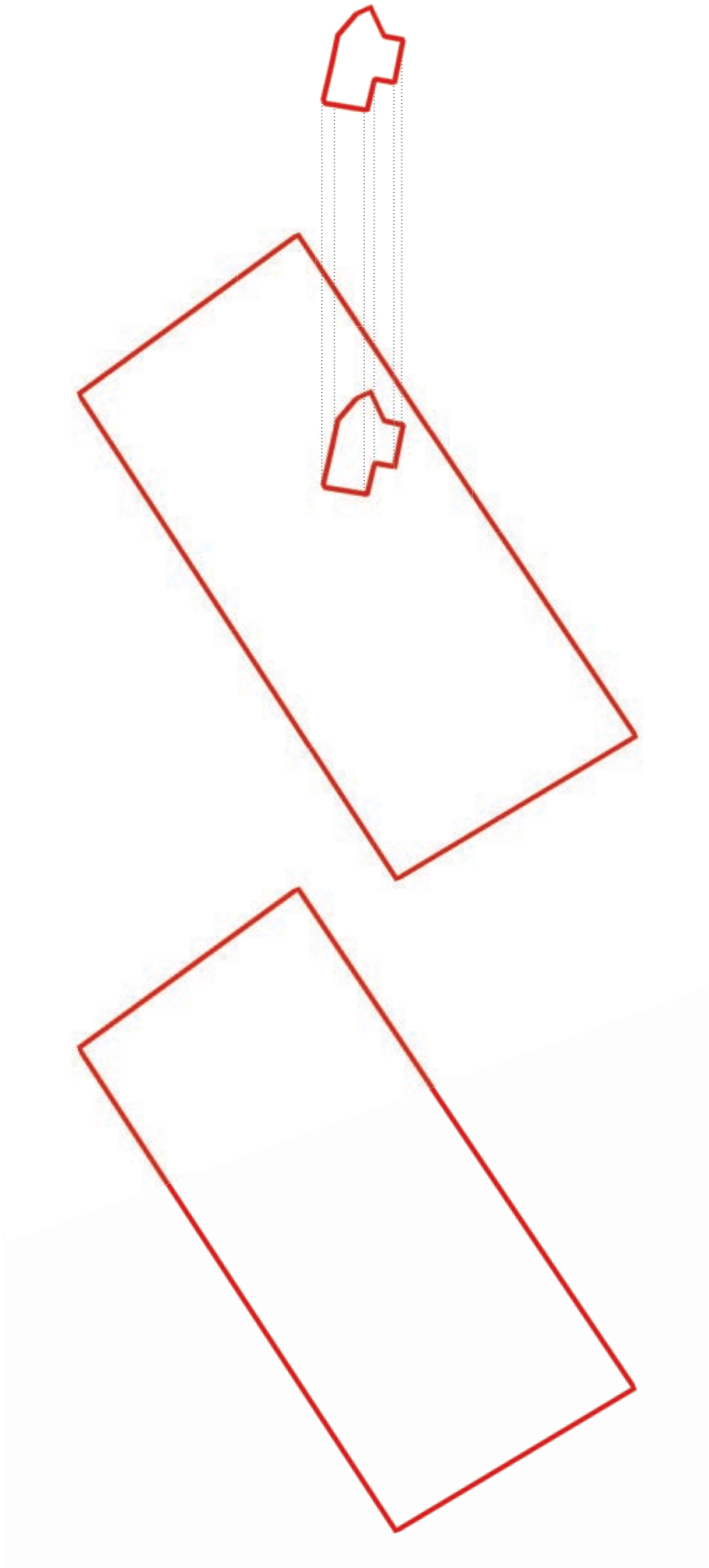
Location: Benghazi, Libya
Date: 2005

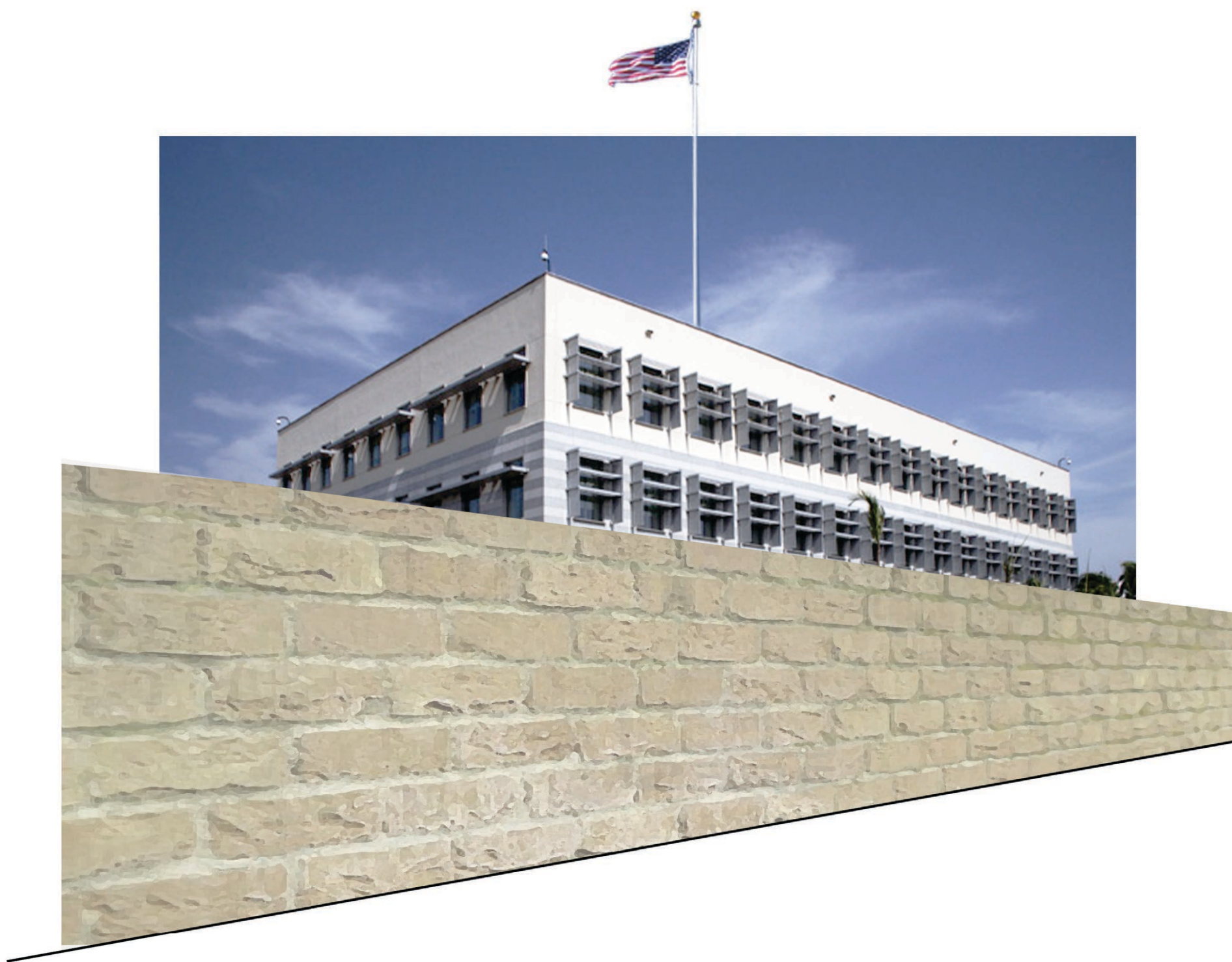
Architect: Unknown
Size: TBA

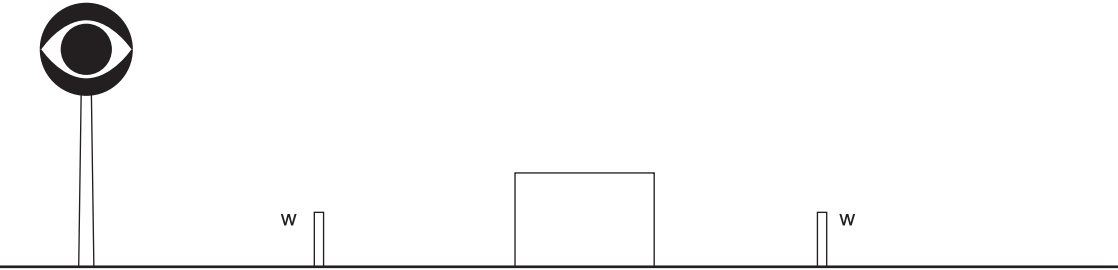
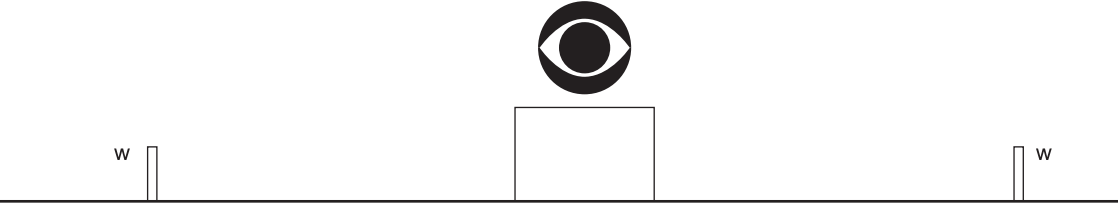
Lesson: Failure of Rural Sites

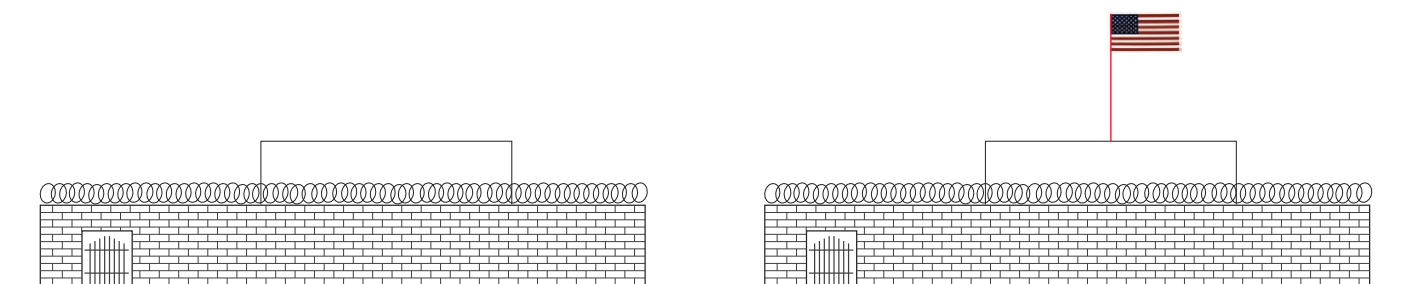
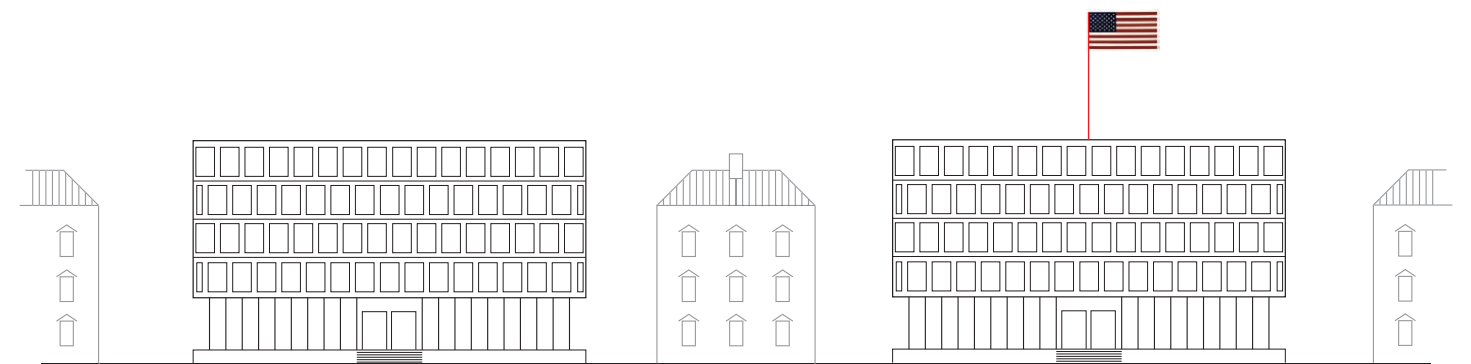
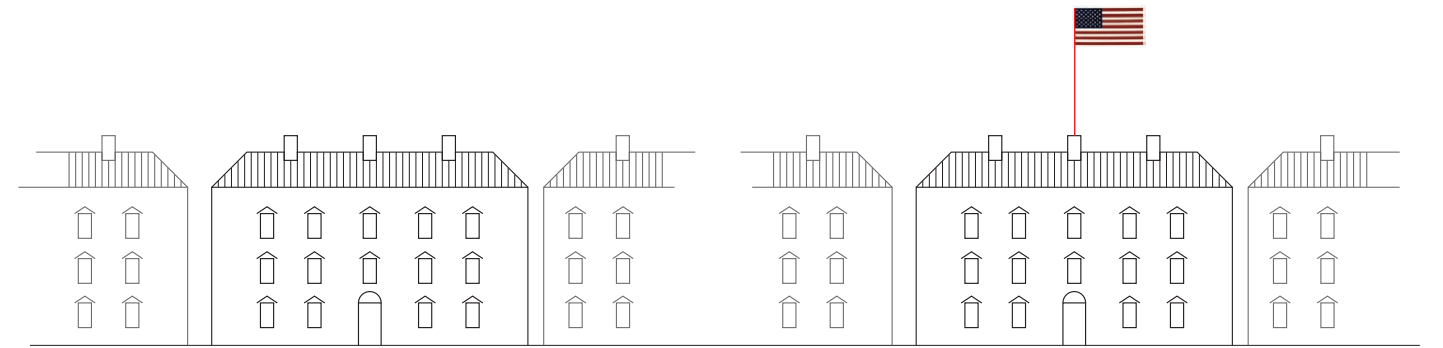
The attack on September 11, 2012 highlights the failure of contemporary embassy design. The perception of safety in the rural community has proven to be just an illusion.

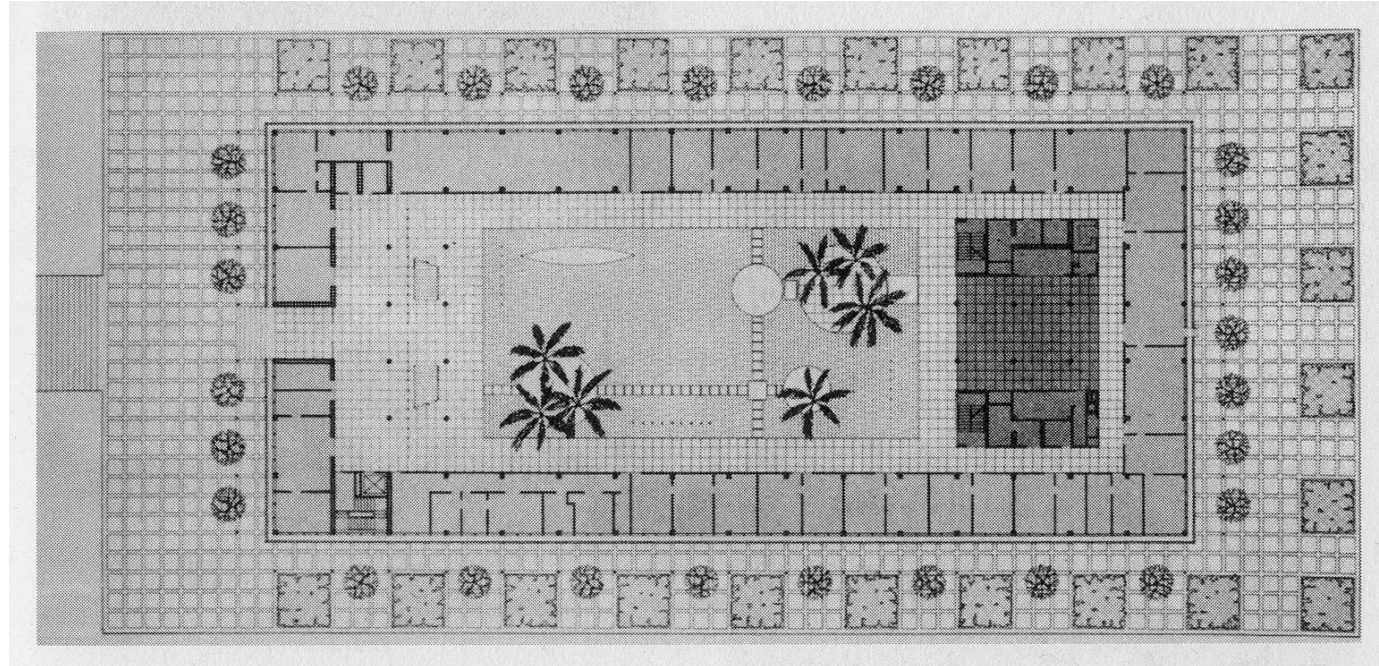
The diplomatic sacrifice of locating the embassy outside the city must be changed.











Location: New Delhi, India
Date: 1956

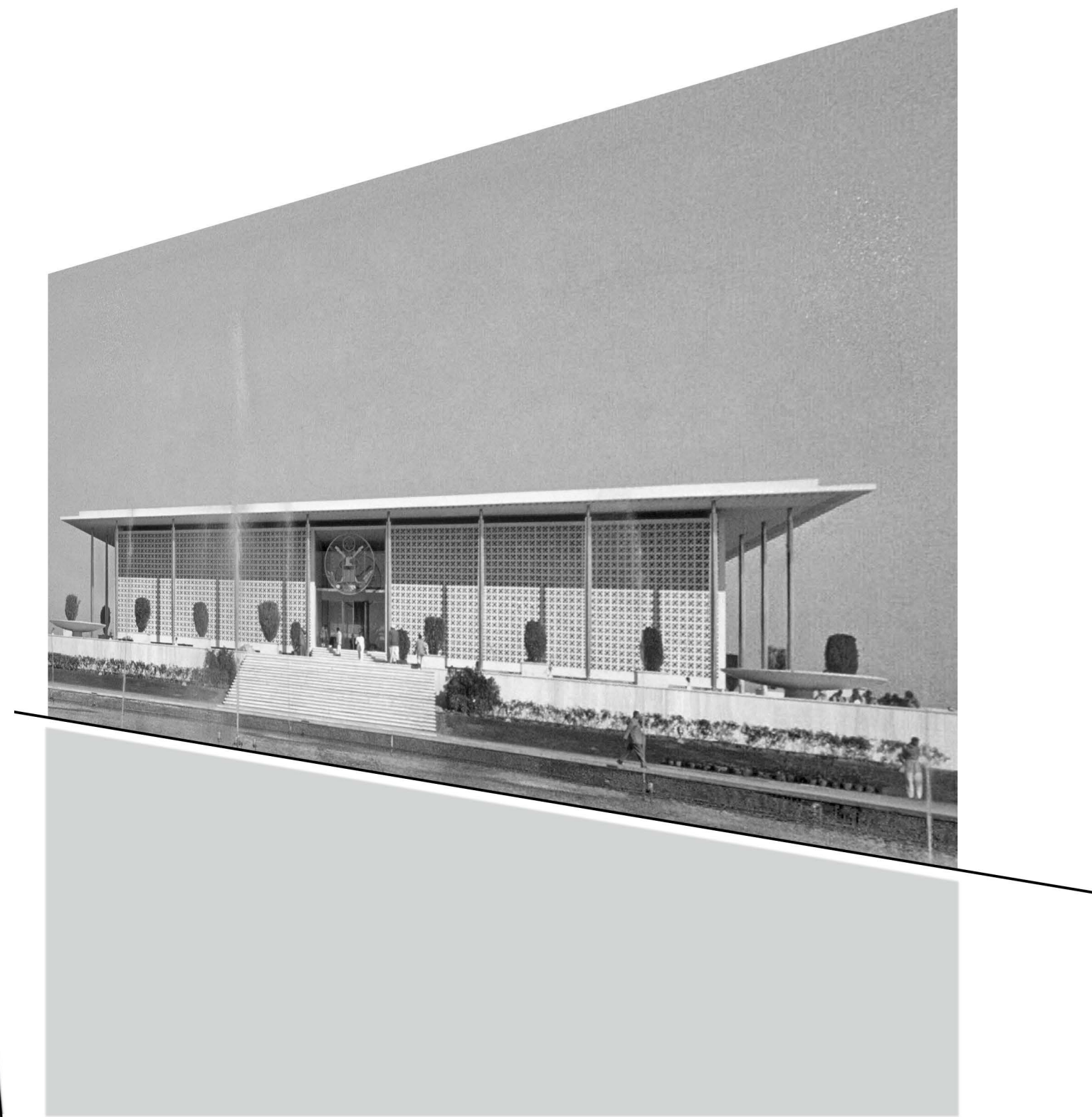
Architect: Edward Durrell Stone
Size: TBA

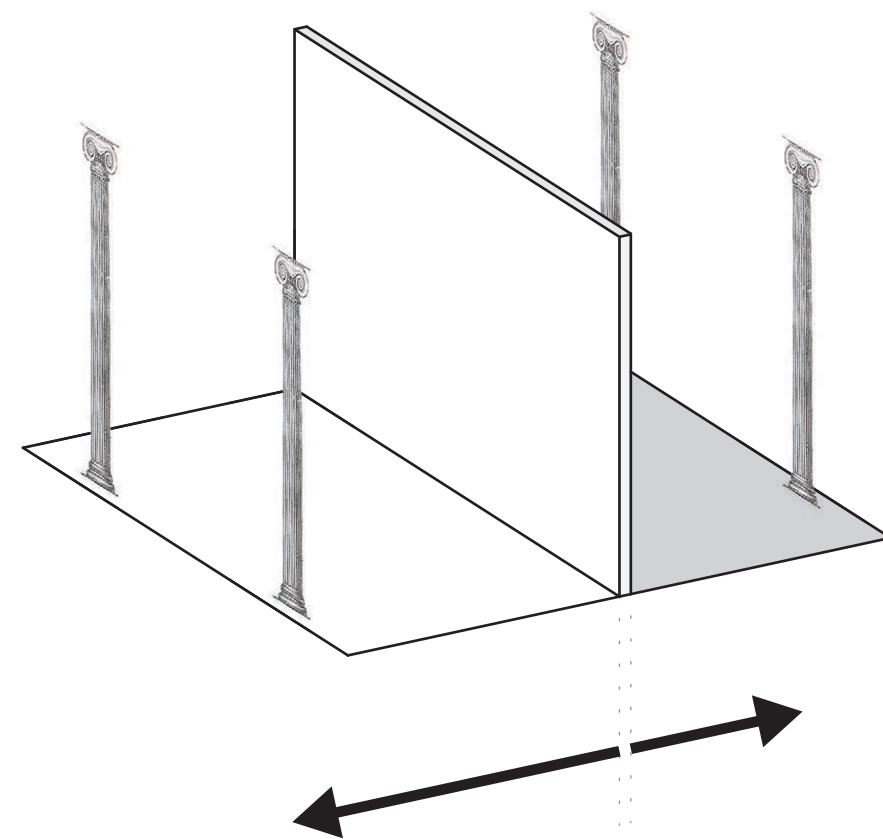
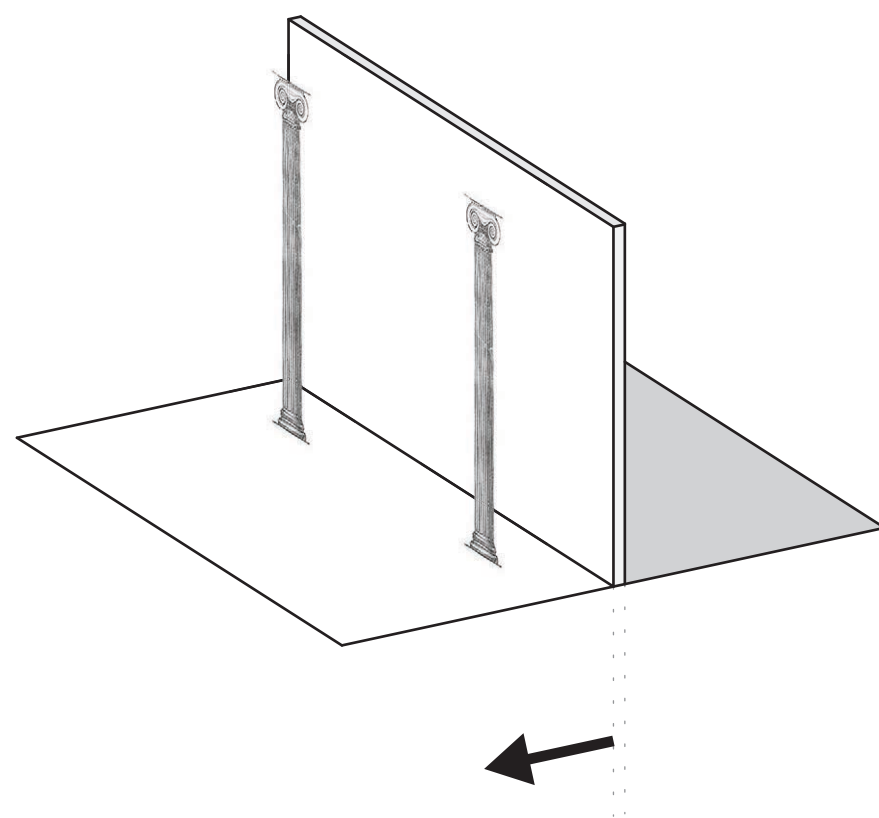
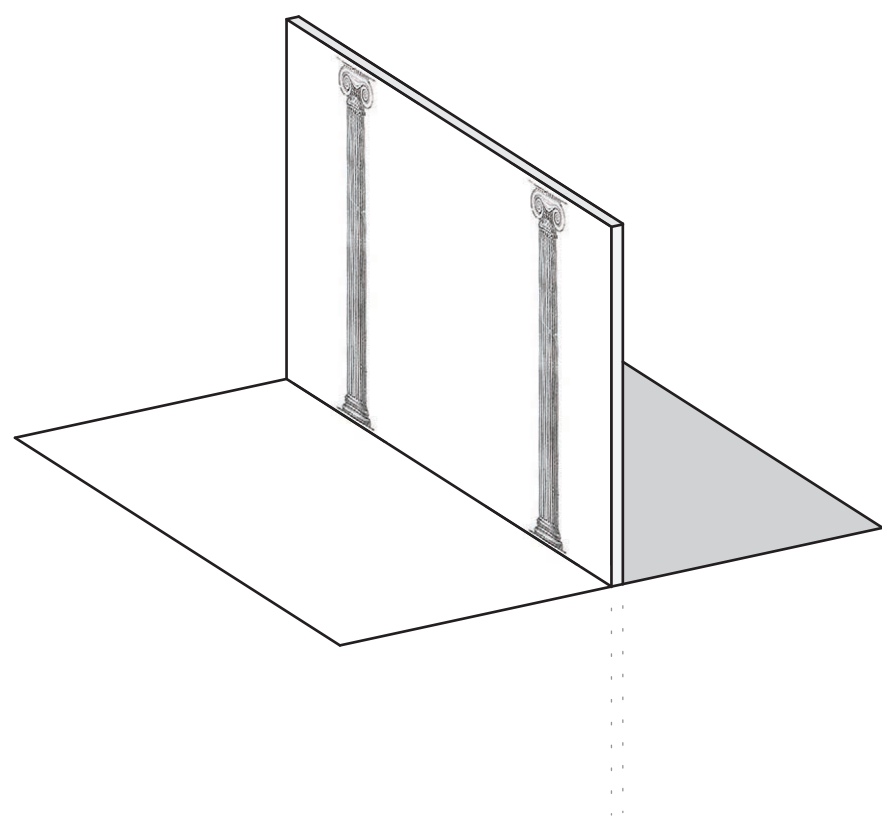
Lesson: Quintessential Modernism

The embassy in New Delhi is one of the preeminent examples of international style diplomatic structures. Additionally, its still being used today.

The brise-soleil, slender columns and carefully considered materials and proportions exemplify the iconic diplomatic embassy of the 1950's.









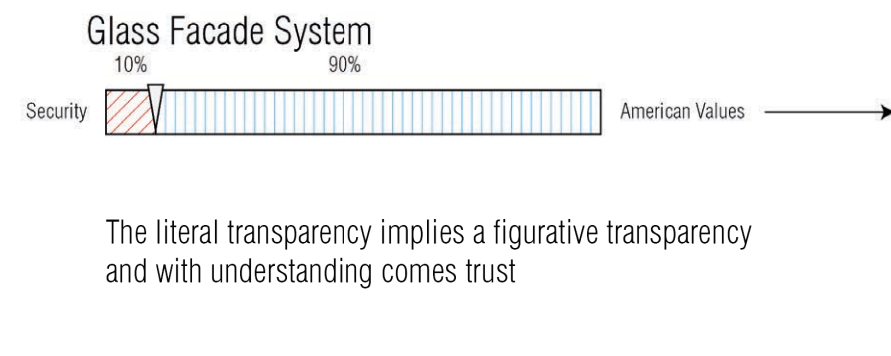
Location: Cairo, Egypt
Date: 1985

Architect: Metcalf & Associates
Size: TBA

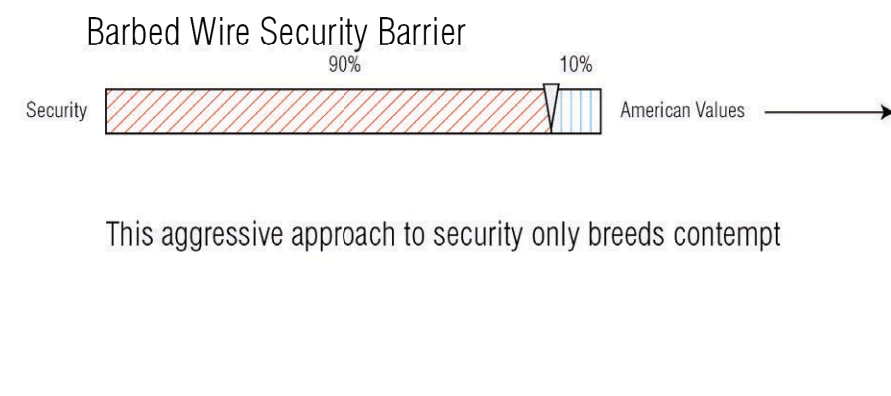
Lesson: Fortress

The embassy in Cairo is devoid of overt symbolism. It is also devoid of anything diplomatic. The brutalist building is imposing and separated from its urban context. The barbed wire and thick concrete block wall conveys the american presence in Egypt.

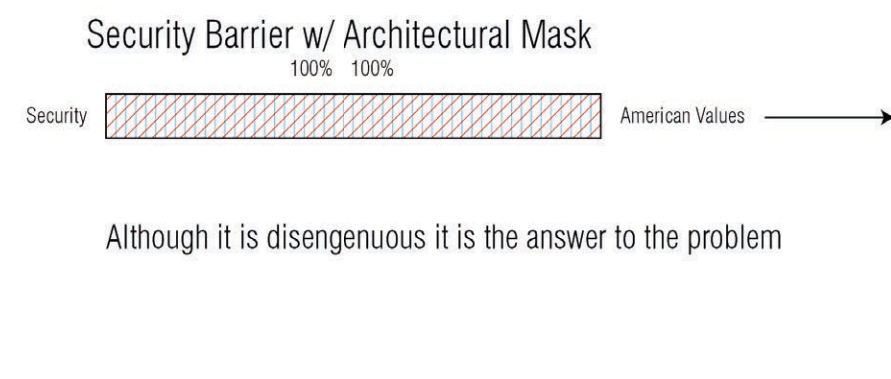




The literal transparency implies a figurative transparency and with understanding comes trust

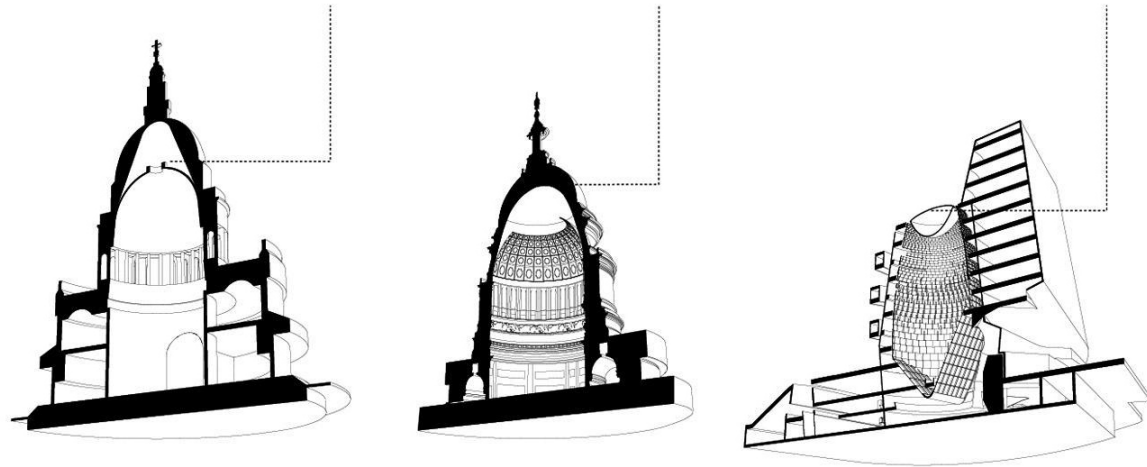


This aggressive approach to security only breeds contempt



Although it is disingenuous it is the answer to the problem

ST PAULS CATHEDRAL: 227' ~ 69m US CAPITOL: 180' 8" ~ 55m US EMBASSY LONDON: 156' 2" ~ 47.6m



Location: London, England
Date: 2010

Architect: Morphosis
Size: TBA

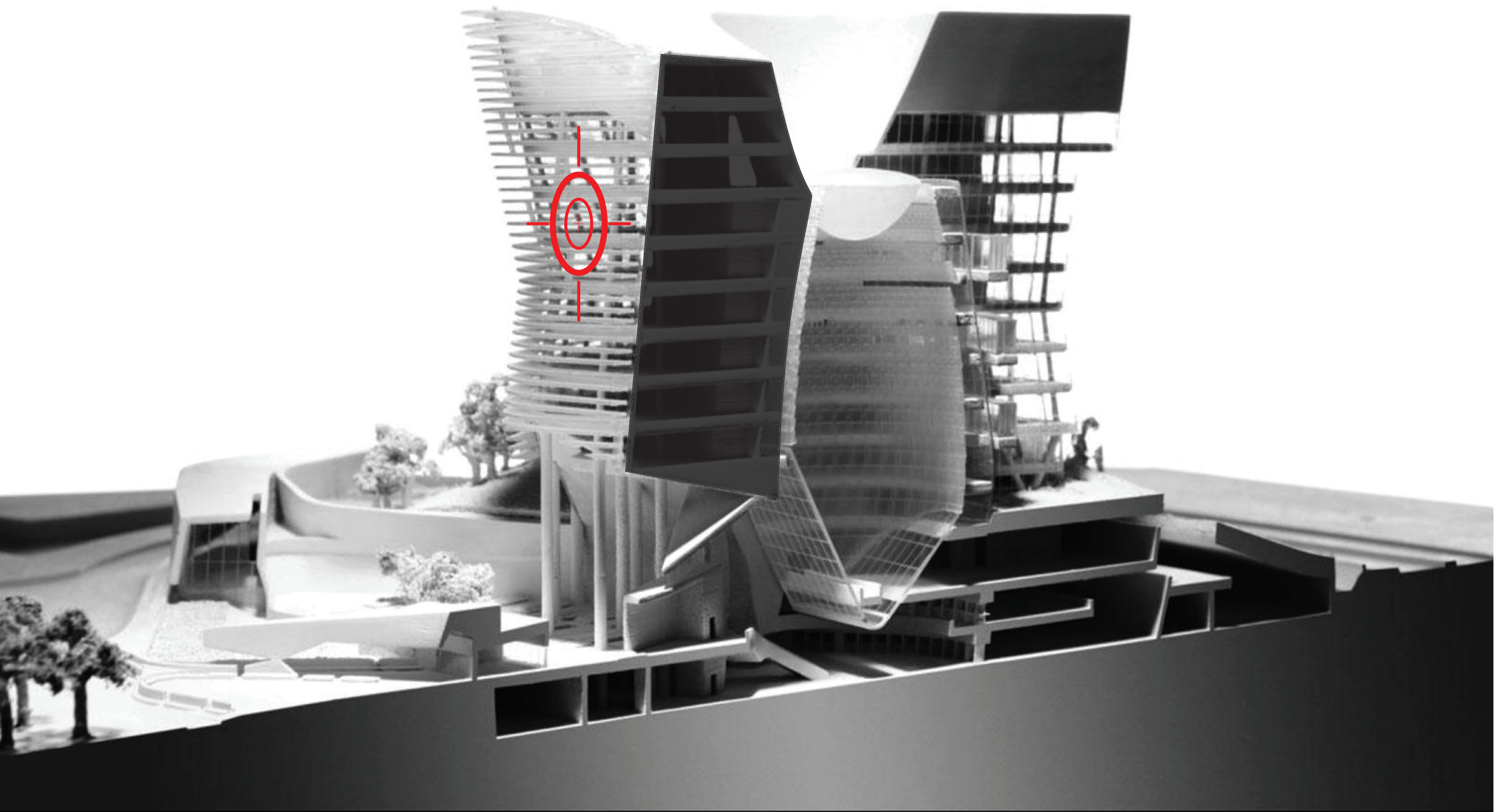
Lesson: Formal Architectural Symbolism

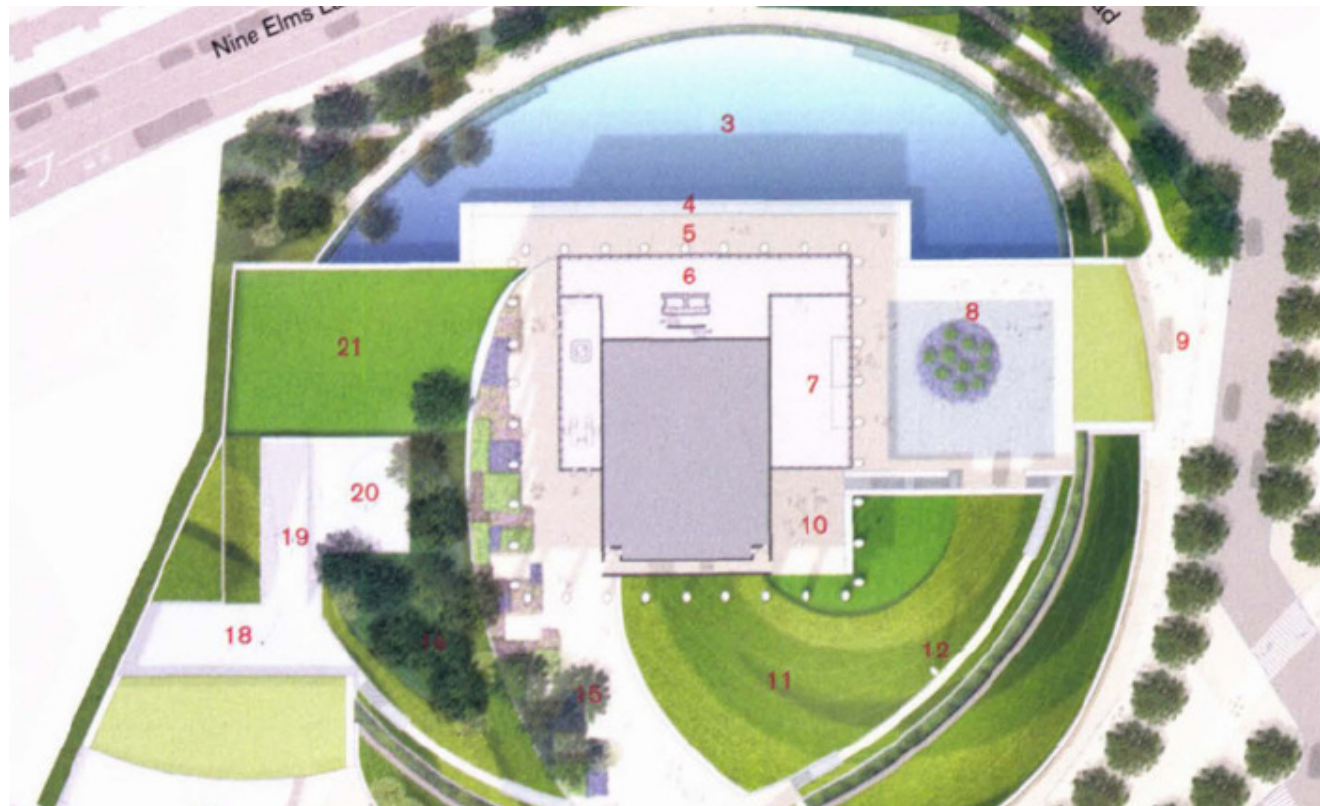
The Morphosis proposal is compelling because it internalizes the American architectural symbolism. Instead of the screaming eagle, the image of the nation is protected within the embassy's office block

⁴² Runner up proposal for new American embassy in London . Morphopedia

⁴³ Symbol Enclosed . Morphopedia







Location: London, England
Date: 2010

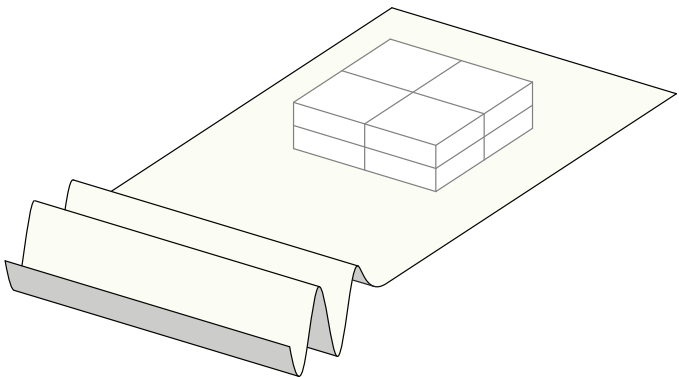
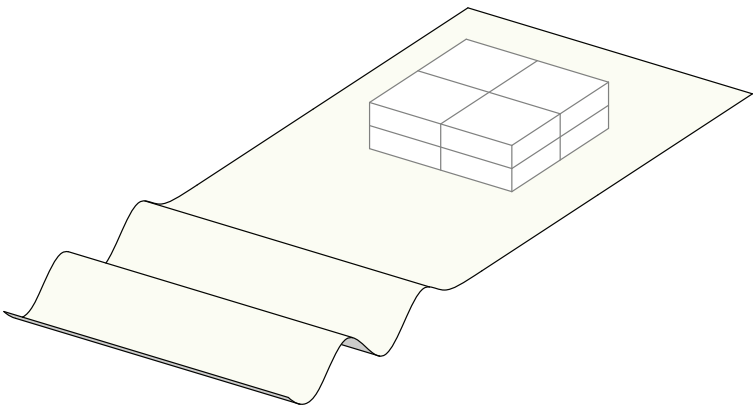
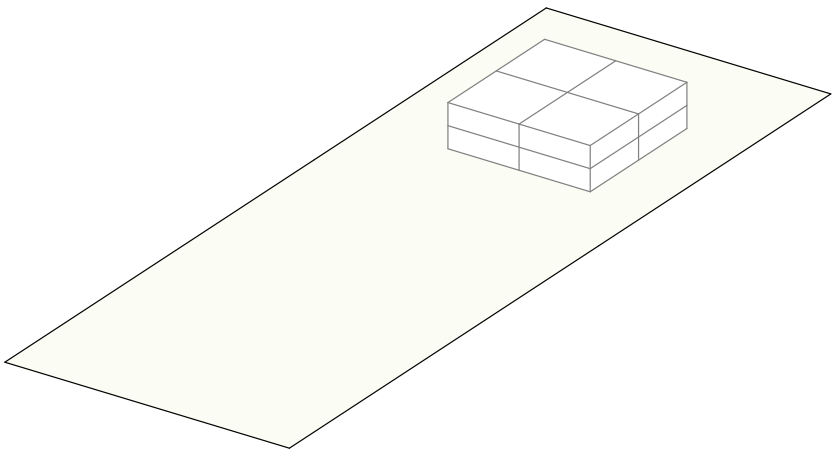
Architect: Kieran Timberlake
Size: TBA

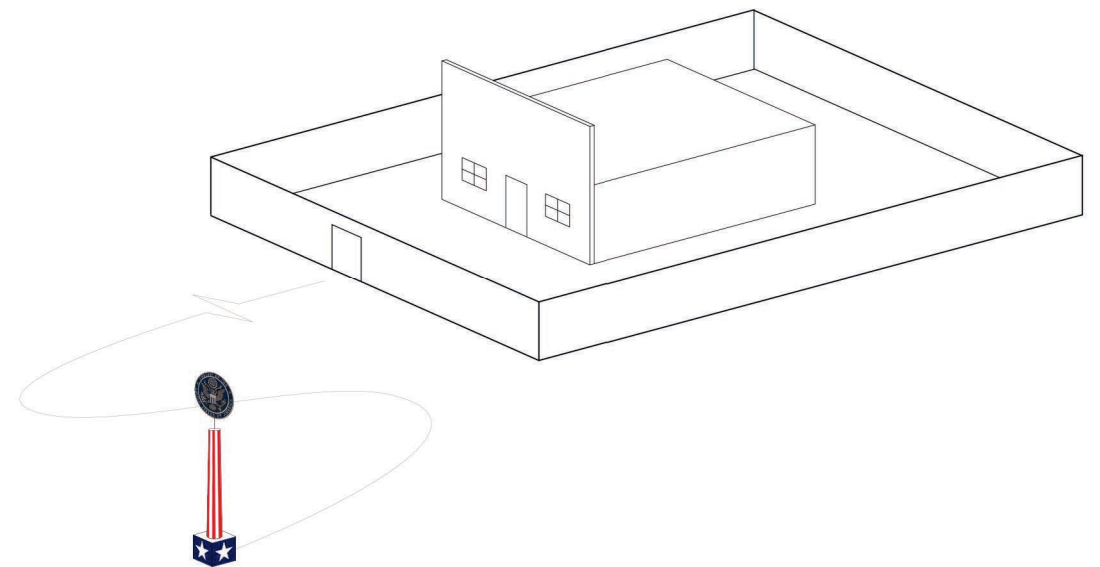
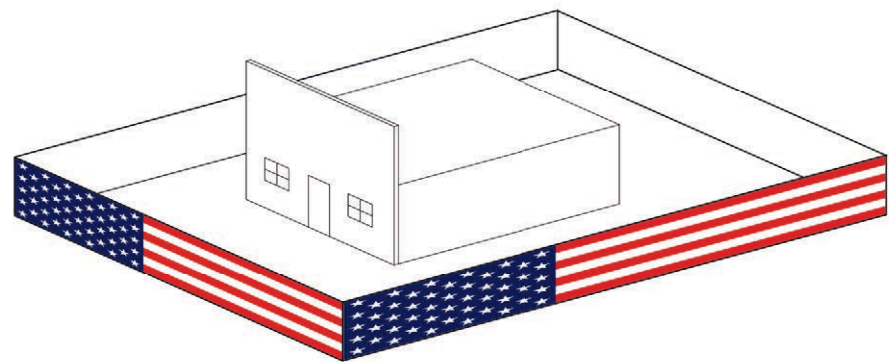
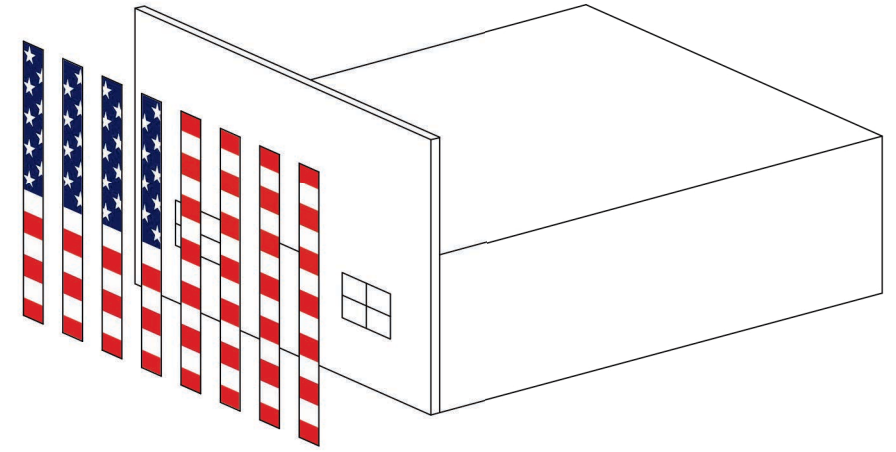
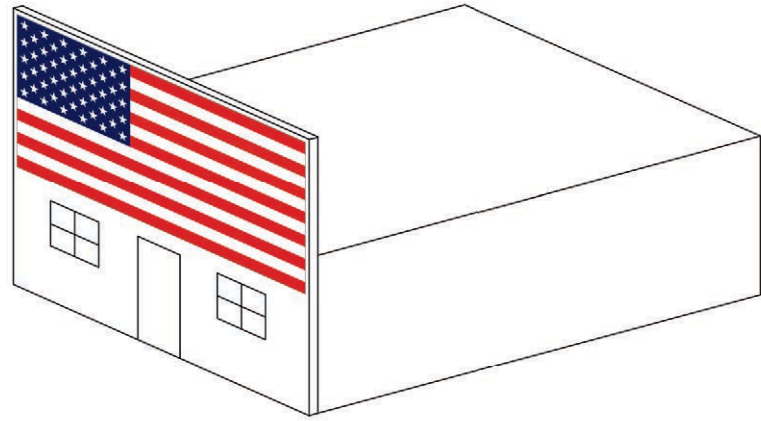
Lesson: Sustainable Image

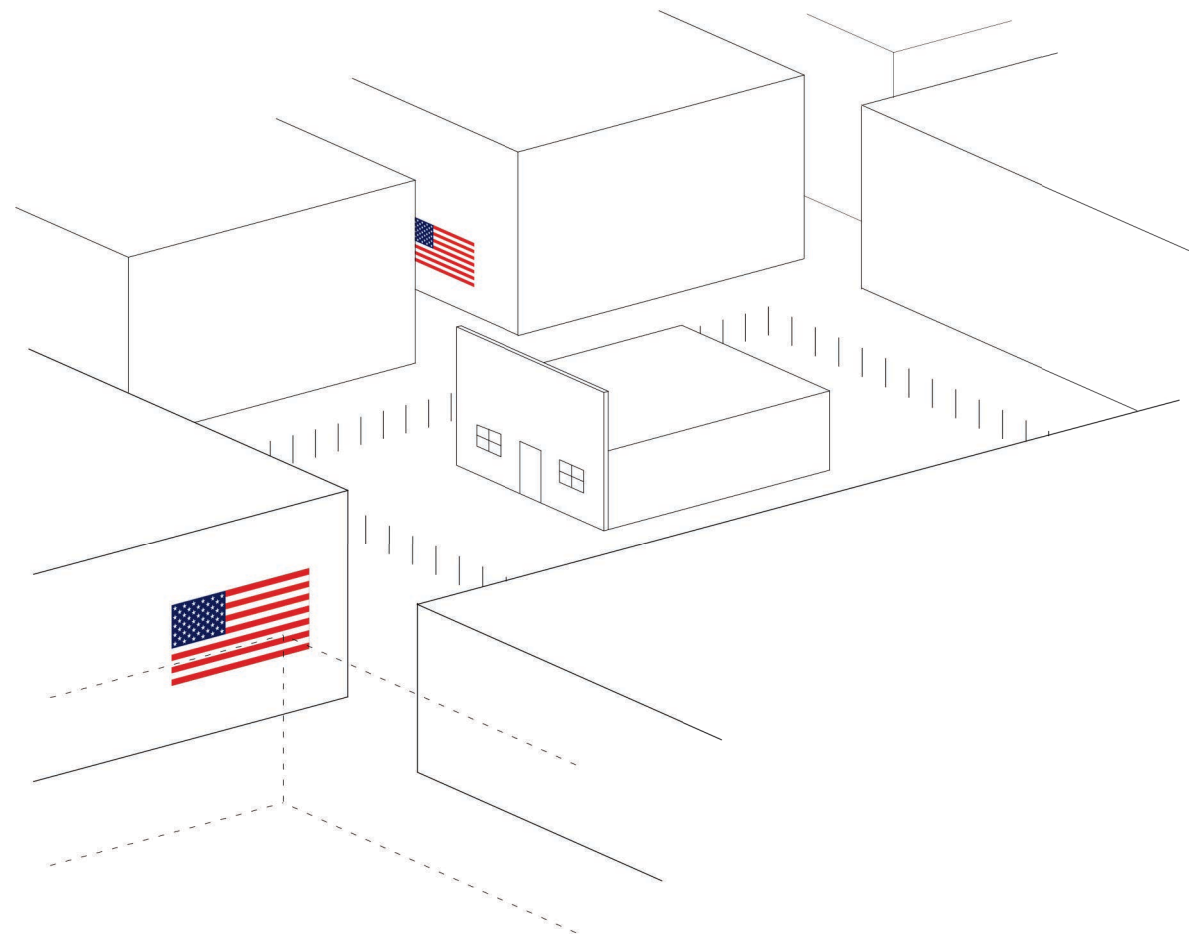
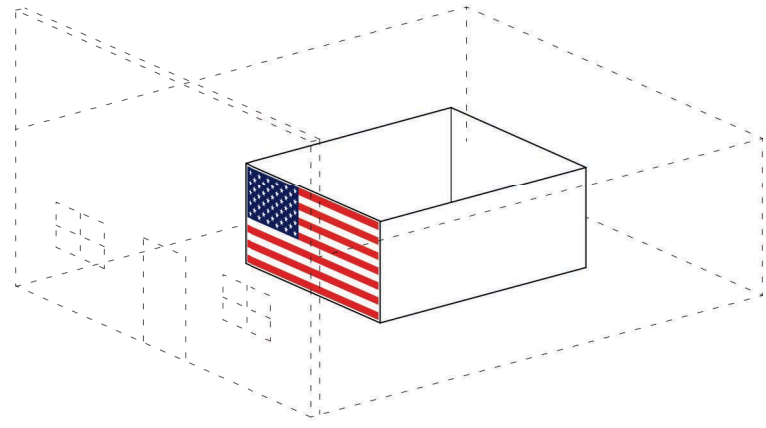
The design by Kieran Timberlake emphasizes sustainability and landscape.

The structure is embedded in an undulating garden with a large reflecting pool (moat).



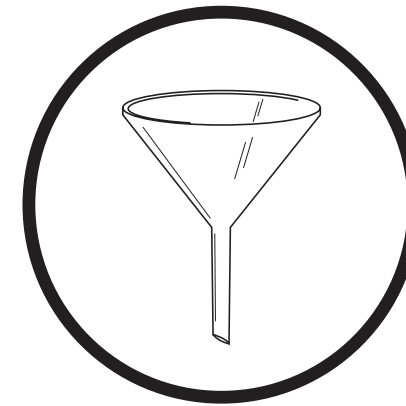




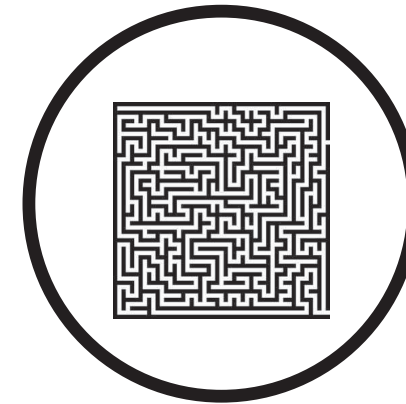
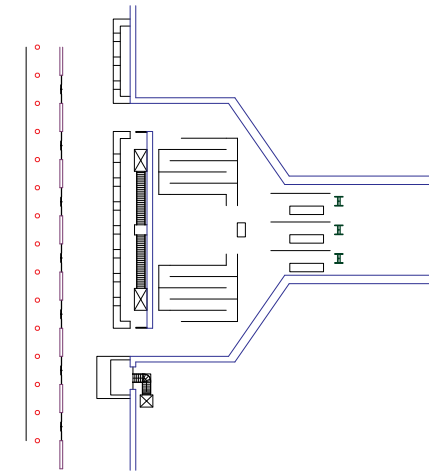


methodology 4

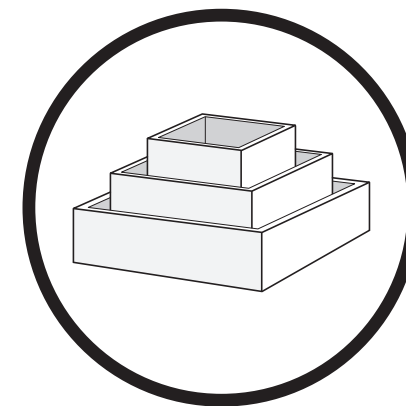
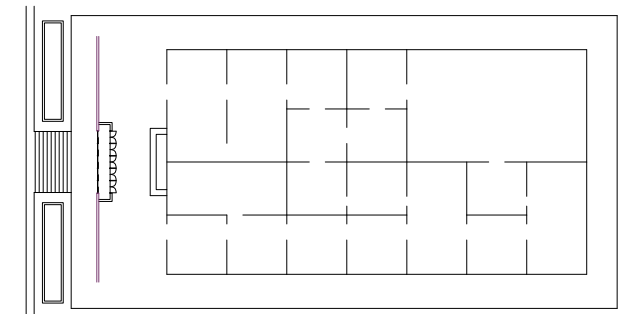
secure typologies



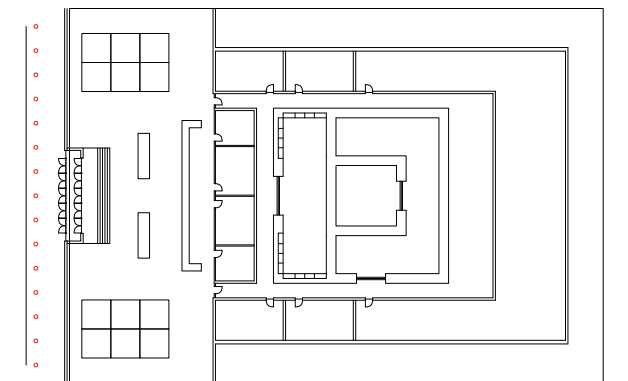
AIRPORT - FUNNEL

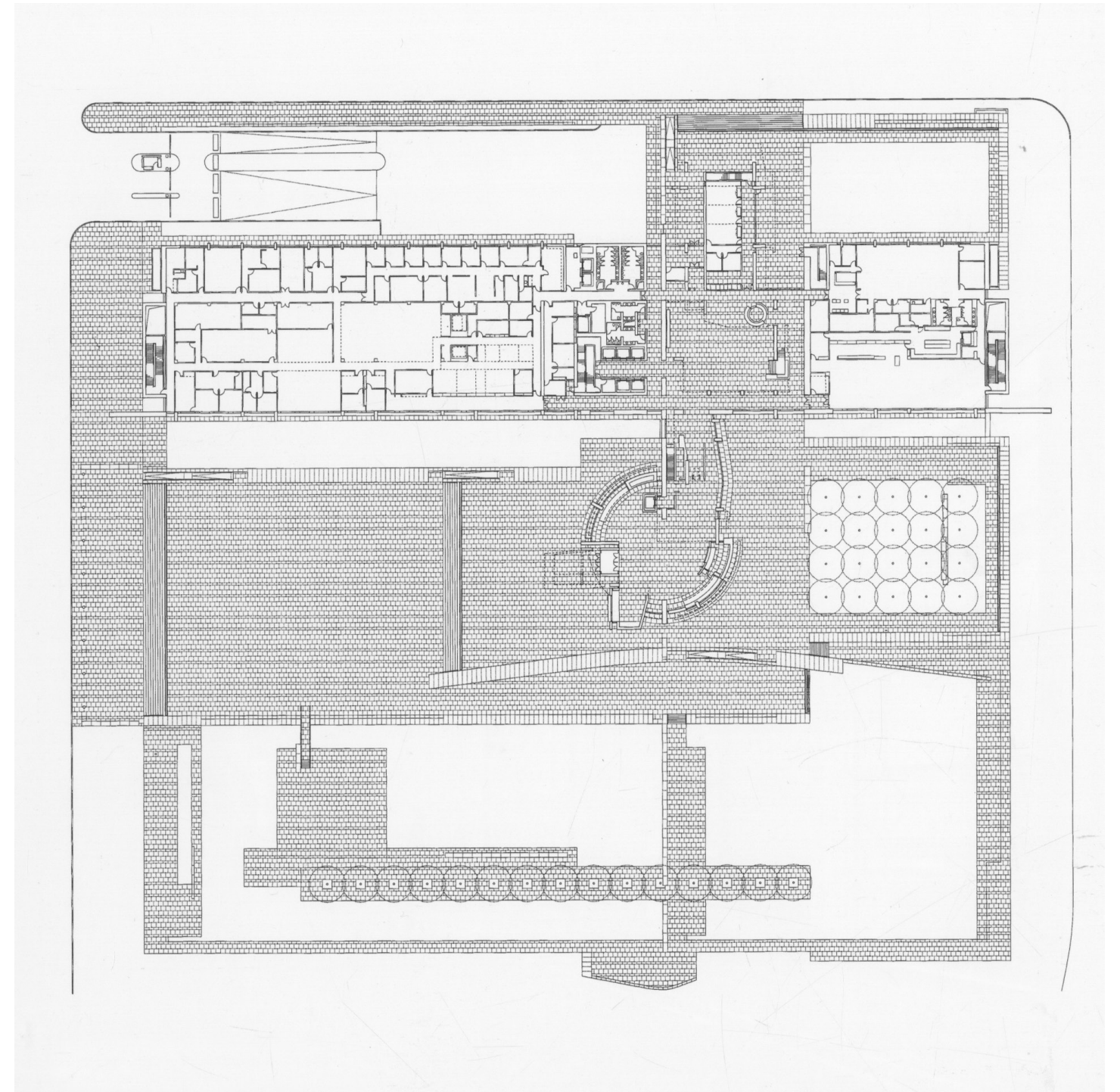


MUSEUM - MAZE

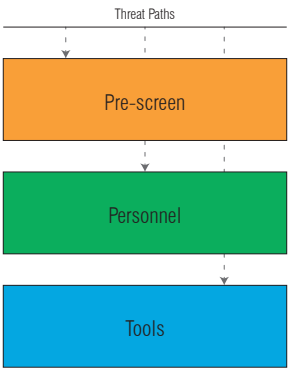


BANK - NESTING DOLL



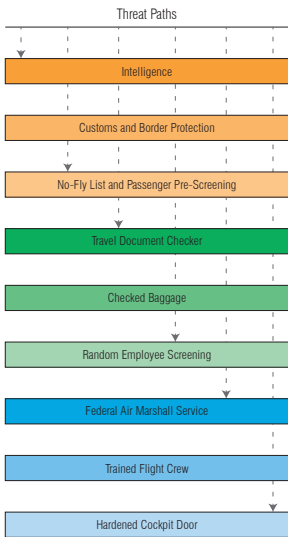


General Security



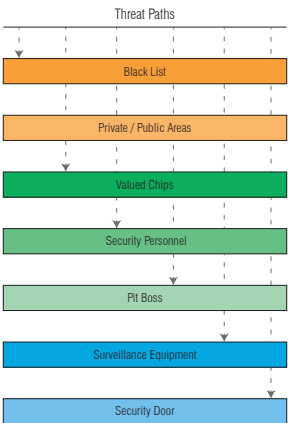
Airport Security

Threats: Terrorists



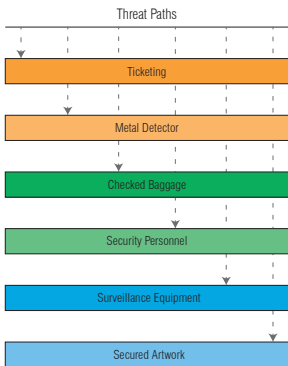
Casino Security

Threats: Thiefs



Museum Security

Threats: Art Thiefs, Vandals



methodology 5

security systems



Surveillance



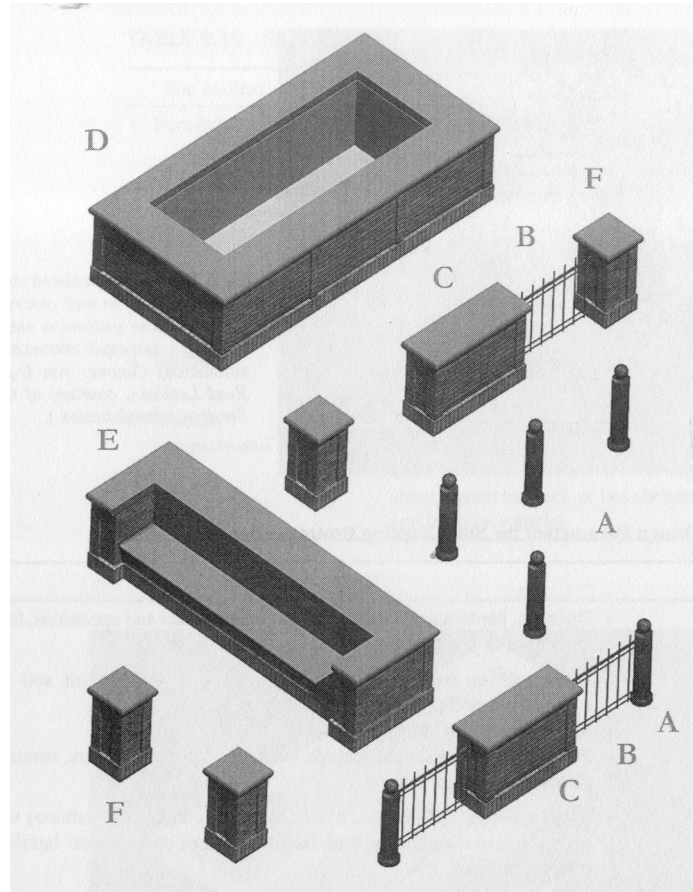
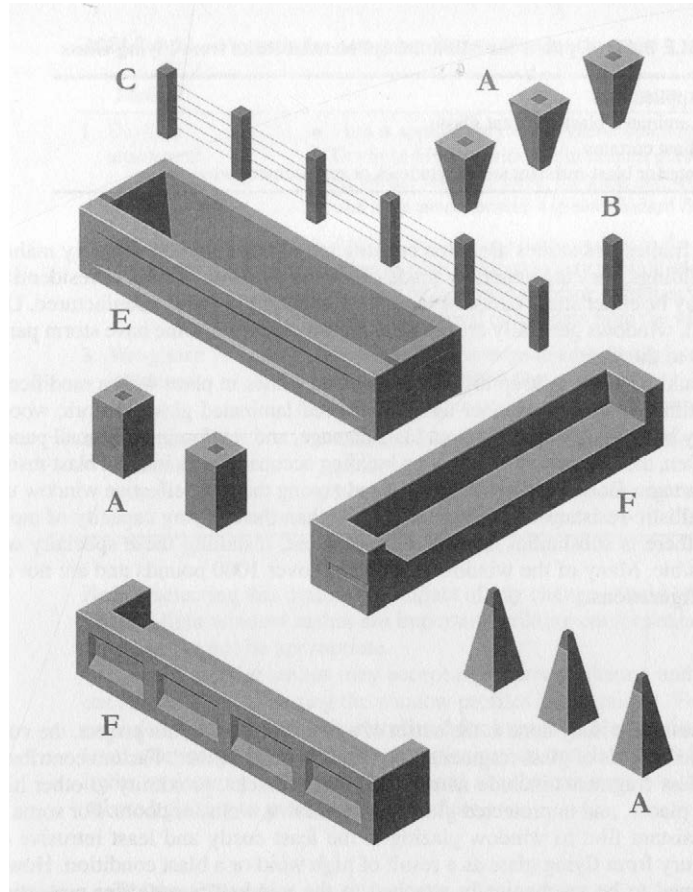
Screening



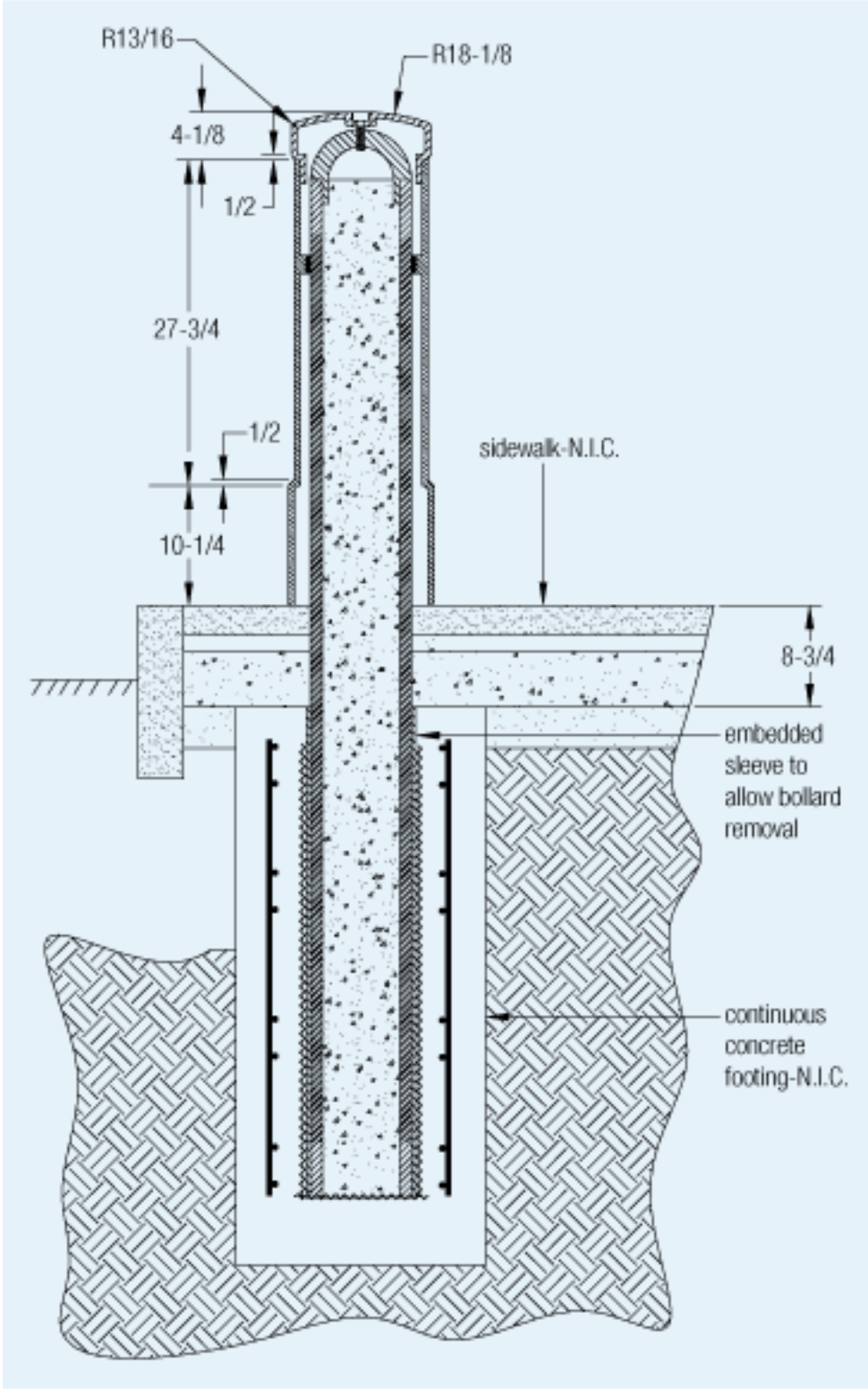
Physical Defense



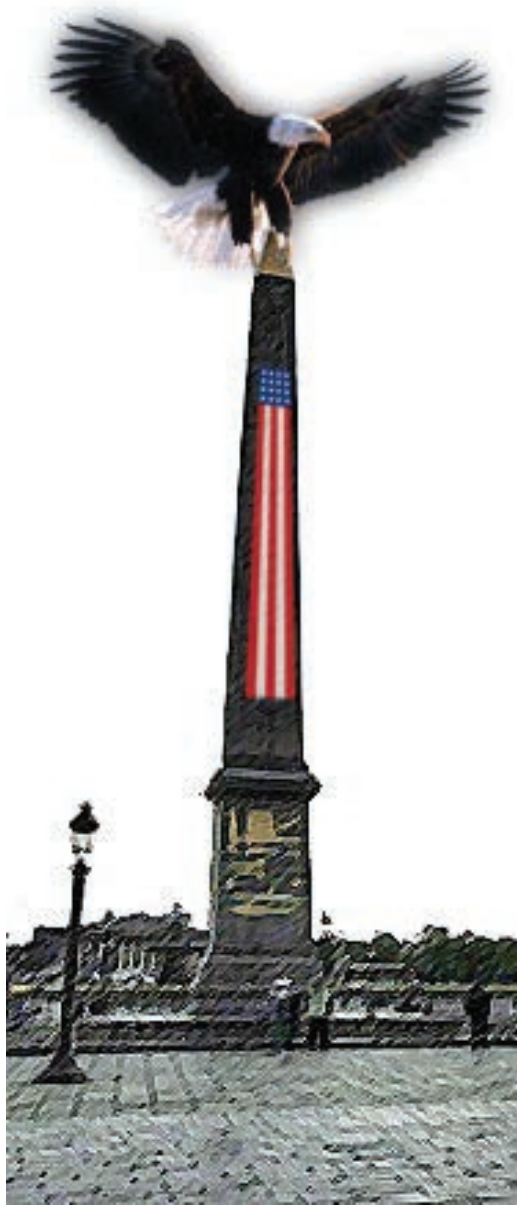
Security Personnel







appendix



Symbolic Diplomacy



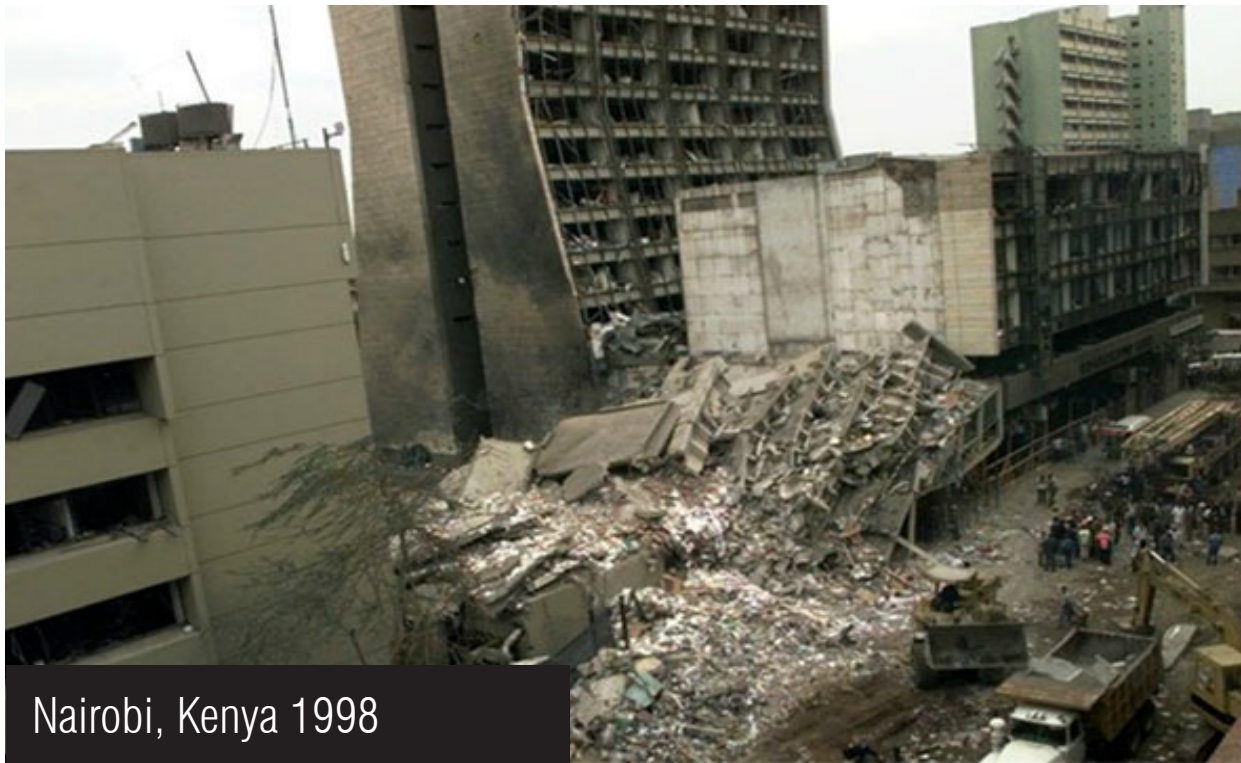
Functional Diplomacy



Beirut, Lebanon 1983



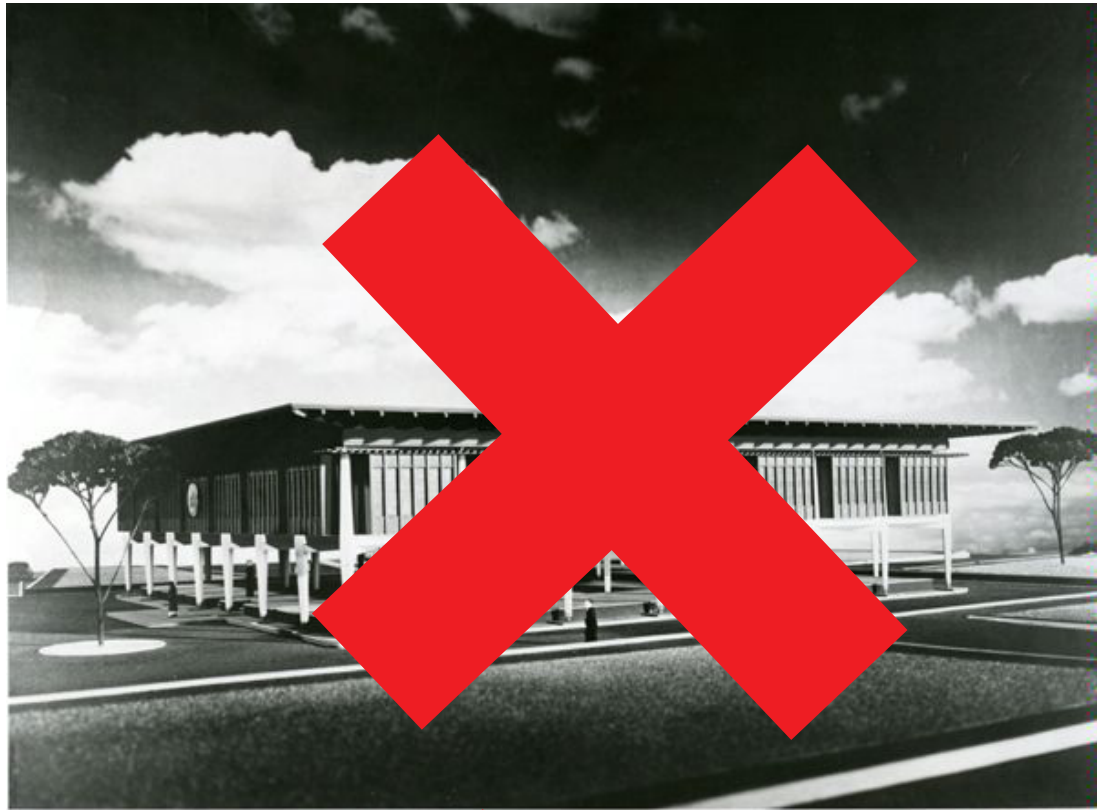
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania 1998



Nairobi, Kenya 1998



Yemen, 2012





United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans: 1987

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans: 1988

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans

1989

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICANS

1996

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans

10th Anniversary Issue

1997

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Political Violence Against Americans

1998

Nairobi

Dar es Salaam

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans

1990

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans

1991

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICANS

1992

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICANS 2001

REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICANS

2008

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans

1993

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans

1994

United States Department of State
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Significant Incidents of Political Violence Against Americans

1995

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICANS

2009

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICANS

2010

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICANS

2011



Belmopan, Belize



Bamaka, Mali



Astana, Kazakhstan

STANDARD EMBASSY DESIGN: SMALL*	STANDARD EMBASSY DESIGN: MEDIUM*	STANDARD EMBASSY DESIGN: LARGE*
		
Estimated construction cost: less than \$47 million†	Estimated construction cost: more than \$68 million†	Estimated construction cost: less than \$88 million†
Approximate size: 4,300 gross square meters (gsm)	Approximate size: 4,300–7,400 gsm	Approximate size: greater than 7,400 gsm
Estimated planning time: 6 months	Estimated planning time: 6 months	Estimated planning time: 6 months
Estimated design-build acquisition time: 6 months	Estimated design-build acquisition time: 6 months	Estimated design-build acquisition time: 6 months
Estimated design-construction time: 15 months	Estimated design-construction time: 24 months	Estimated design-construction time: 28 months
Estimated commissioning time: 2 months	Estimated commissioning time: 2 months	Estimated commissioning time: 2 months
Estimated total project time: 29 months	Estimated total project time: 38 months	Estimated total project time: 42 months

* Source: Joseph W. Toussaint, managing director, Project Execution, Office of Overseas Buildings Operations, U.S. Department of State

documentation

Figure Credits

1 Collage Image: AIA Adapting Standard Embassy Design to Specific Sites

3a Peace of Westphalia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ratification_of_the_Treaty_of_Munster,_Gerard_Ter_Borch_\(1648\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ratification_of_the_Treaty_of_Munster,_Gerard_Ter_Borch_(1648).jpg)
3b Iwo Jima [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ratification_of_the_Treaty_of_Munster,_Gerard_Ter_Borch_\(1648\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ratification_of_the_Treaty_of_Munster,_Gerard_Ter_Borch_(1648).jpg)
3c Protests in Sanaa, Yemen <http://www.thepressproject.gr/article/27841/pagoreusi-tis-prosbasis-sto-YouTube-sto-fganistan>

5a US Cultural Sites
5b Delano and Aldrich
5c Saarinen
5d http://www.huffingtonpost.com/j-michael-welton/edward-durell-stone_b_1195116.html
5e AIA Adapting Standard Embassy Design to Specific Sites
5f http://london.usembassy.gov/new_embassy.html
5g <http://france.usembassy.gov/>
5h http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Eug%C3%A8ne_Delacroix_-_La_libert%C3%A9_guidant_le_peuple.jpg
5i <http://www.mamak.bel.tr/galeri/fotograflarla-ataturk.aspx>
5j <http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/action/ExternalIdSearch?id=520748>
5k <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/40/Beirutembassy.jpg>
5l state department publication 1998
5m state department publication 1998
5n NY Times <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/12/world/middleeast/Damage-to-the-American-Consulate-in-Benghazi-Libya.html>

6a Peace of Westphalia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ratification_of_the_Treaty_of_Munster,_Gerard_Ter_Borch_\(1648\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ratification_of_the_Treaty_of_Munster,_Gerard_Ter_Borch_(1648).jpg)
6b Iwo Jima [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ratification_of_the_Treaty_of_Munster,_Gerard_Ter_Borch_\(1648\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Ratification_of_the_Treaty_of_Munster,_Gerard_Ter_Borch_(1648).jpg)
6c Protests in Sanaa, Yemen <http://www.thepressproject.gr/article/27841/pagoreusi-tis-prosbasis-sto-YouTube-sto-fganistan>

8a <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>
8b http://filmdenken.de/11-september-2001_-9-11_lugen_fluge_verschwörungen_-inside-job_false-flag-operation_mega-ritual1/
8c <http://politiken.dk/udland/ECE1270584/sikkerhedskilde-bin-laden-skulle-likvideres/>

19 Paris Collage

23a <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jessicahitch/4788945843/lightbox/>
23b Breuer
23c http://www.allposters.com/-sp/US-Marine-Standing-Guard-at-Gate-to-US-Embassy-Posters_i8496825_.htm
23d SAFE AIA Design for Diplomacy

29 PariserPlatz

37 New Delhi Collage

52a http://www.picstopin.com/510/camaras-en-vivo/http:%7C%7Cwww*marparaisopma*com%7Cimages%7Cmapa01*gif/
52b <http://gdmcdc.en.made-in-china.com/product/QMZxXmrcAdky/China-Metal-Detector-Gate-with-6-Zone-LED-and-Audio-Alert-MCD-100-.html>
52c <http://i2securitygroup.com/2012/10/23/vehicle-anti-ram-electric-bollard/>
52d http://blogs.state.gov/index.php/site/entry/marine_security_guards

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This is the foundation of my architectural theory that investigations symbolism, signage in the communicative properties of architecture in their urban contexts.

Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial. Eisenman Architects. The Monacelli Press. 2002

This articulates the methods of designing the space between the city and the embassy

Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish The Birth of the Prison*. Random House. 1977

This text informs the understanding of the power of architectural space and the state.

Sebastian Redecke and Ralph Stern. *Foreign Affairs: New Embassy Buildings and the German Foreign Office in Berlin*. Birkhauser Verlag, 1997.

Information on embassy precedents not for the USA

Jane C. Loeffler. *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America’s Embassies, 2nd Edition*. Princeton Architectural Press, 2011.

This is my primary informational text on the history of embassy design and how it has changed from 1931 until today. It follows the bureaucratic processes and the influence of the architects

Ron Robin. *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900-1965*. Princeton University Press, 1992.

This book also illustrates American embassies over the course of history. This book also goes into more detail on the influence of these projects in their sites abroad and the foreign policy implications and intentions.

“Design for Diplomacy: New Embassies for the 21st Century”. The American Institute of Architects. A Report of the AIA 21st Century Embassy Task Force

Text produced by the AIA for architects designing new US embassies

David G. DeLong and C. Ford Peatross. *Eero Saarinen: Buildings from the Bathazar Korab Archive*. W.W. Norton and Company. Library of Congress, 2008. pgs 236-255.

Coverage of Saarinen’s project in London as well as his influence in other diplomatic projects

Barbara A. Nadel. Building Security: Handbook for Architectural Planning and Design. McGraw Hill. 2004

This is the handbook for everything that architects can do to design secure buildings from materials and surveillance components and security systems to the articulation of entrances

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